

**THE DANGERS OF GODFATHERISM IN ELECTORAL PROCESS:
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

GABRIEL FAVOUR EKE, Ph.D*

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIOLOGY,
WESTERN DELTA UNIVERSITY,
OGHARA, DELTA STATE,
NIGERIA**

TELEPHONE: +2348056175436

E-MAIL: ekgabriel favour@gmail.com.

FELIX SADO OSAYANDE OSAGHAE, Ph.D**

**INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND EXTENSION SERVICES,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
EKEHUAN CAMPUS,
BENIN CITY, EDO STATE
NIGERIA.**

E-mail: lixosaghae@yahoo.com

TEL: +2348064448851



MAY, 2016

***Dr. Gabriel Favour EKE** is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Sociology Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State, Nigeria.

****Dr. Felix Sado Osayande Osaghae** is a Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Public Administration and Extension Services, University of Benin, Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, Nigeria.

**THE DANGERS OF GODFATHERISM IN ELECTORAL PROCESS: THE
NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

Abstract

The paper discusses the destructive trends in Nigerian political Phenomenon known as Godfatherism. It states that this was the reason why Nigeria after fifty years of independence, has not made any serious impact in its political development, while it continues to blame the colonial masters for its problems. The paper was of the opinion that this is the phenomenon in which wealthy and powerful individuals in the society multiply corruption by installing their protégé in office. By this method, the candidates no longer depend on their popularity with the people, but by the whims and caprices of the Godfathers. The paper explains the danger of this method, in that people no longer have trust in our electoral system because violence, intimidation and subversion of the rule of law become the order of the day, hence the dearth of development becomes the resultant effect. Also, the oath taking by prospective candidates in a shrine before their Godfathers as a pre-requisite for acceptance and a guarantee to fulfilling their agreement is also presented here with exemplifications. The paper concludes, inter alia the holistic reconfiguration of the total apparatus of the Nigerian state; the phenomenon called Godfatherism be abrogated in the Nigerian political life and ultimately, the nation's electoral laws should be strengthened and offenders be allowed to face the whole wrought of the law.

Keyword: *Godfatherism, Corruption, electoral fraud, intimidation and development*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of political development in Nigeria has produced dangerous phenomenon known as Godfatherism. It is very dangerous in the sense that it has dominated the political life and discourse in this country. At the emergence of the fourth Republic in 1999, the hope of most Nigerians is that the political system will develop to the extent that democracy will produce the best candidates for Nigeria, hence sustainable development will be insured. However, the opposite is the case; hence since 1999 till date there is the emergence of a very influential group known as godfathers or money bags (Rose-Ackernam 1999). They are found in almost

every state in Nigeria, but mostly in the south, that is, West, South East and South South and North Central geo-political zones of Nigeria.

This emerging group is instrumental to the promotion of electoral fraud and violence. Most of the problems of destructive instruments and behavior associated with the recent actors in politics are brought about by this group. Hitherto, Politics in Nigeria has become for the rich and those who are ready to pay the price. For candidates to win an election in Nigeria, they must look for these godfathers, who will initiate them into a particular cult known in their own language as ‘Bathing’ before their candidature can be accepted. Worst still, they (Godfathers) subject the candidates to oath taking to ensure that they will not renege on the agreement. Thereafter, they will embark on unimaginable strategies to make sure the candidates win election by all means, either by hook or crook. This is one of the major reasons that Nigeria after fifty years of independence has not made any significant impact in democracy while we continue to blame the colonial masters for our own misfortune, which we created by ourselves.

Most Nigerians are disenchanted with the electoral process because these so called godfathers involve themselves in rigging, ballot snatching, and stuffing, thuggery and falsification of electoral results in order to make sure their godsons win in an election. They can go to the extent of indulging on killing, raping, arson and kidnapping in order to prevent the other opponent(s) from winning the election. Coker (2004) was of the opinion that elections supposed to be free and fair, and thus a role model where new breed politicians learn good behavior. In the case of Nigeria, some people disappeared, die and even are kidnapped for mere mentioning that they want to contest a particular elective position. When this occurs, nothing happens, the just and many innocent people are killed without the government doing anything to the culprit(s). The human right watch (HRW) in its report on the 2007 general elections in Nigeria sees the term Godfatherism in Nigerian politics as a phenomenon in which wealthy and powerful individuals that do not hold public office but multiply corruption and violence to subvert and control the political

process by installing their protégés into office. Put differently, Ibrahim (2000) sees godfather as men who have the power and personality to determine who gets nominated to contest elections in the state.

THE ENTHRONEMENT OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Ihonvbere (2004) sees the entronement of Godfatherism as one of political rascality. This becomes necessary where somebody who never had a good cultural background, never value human existence and feelings of people are made to win election just for the sole interest of a particular powerful individual called “godfather”. When such an upstate and a stooge comes to power, he uses the position to service the man who brought him to power, irrespective of whether the people are dying and the country is collapsing or not , he does not care as long as he is dancing to the whims and caprices of the man who brought him to power. A typical example is the Mbadinuju of Anambra State of Nigeria in the 1999 election where the schools in the state were closed for more than one year because there was no money to pay teachers salaries, meanwhile the governor was dancing to the tone of his godfathers, while majority of the people were suffering. As far as the governor is concerned, the suffering and death of the people is meaningless to him as long as the wishes of his godfathers were fulfilled. This attitude, go a long way to promote underdevelopment and poverty. Accordingly, Anyebe (2004) sees underdevelopment as a situation where the economic, social, and political conditions of nations are at their rudimentary stage of development. If the major indicators of development are measured, the Nation is backward because it lacks key development facilities including efficient and effective transportation Network, communication system and other infrastructural facilities such as power, water supply, housing etc, These are what the leadership or government supposed to provide for its citizens. The dearth of these provisions shows that a Nation is under developed.

Thus, the godfathers deny the citizenry of quality means of subsistence via the conditions placed on their godsons who are the governors. Other indicators of underdevelopment include poor education and poor health condition etc. Rodney

(1974) sees these conditions as the exploitation of man by man. It is a condition of poverty, ignorance or diseases, mal-distribution of the National income and administrative incompetence and social disorganization. In any situation where the whims and caprices of the Godfathers are adhered to, the conditions of the people are bound to be unimaginably terrible.

THE ACTIVISMS OF THE GODFATHERISMS

The activisms of Godfatherisms spell ignorance, poverty and underdevelopment. Ibrahim (2003) sees Godfatherism as men who have the power and money to determine who gets nominated and to contest elections in a particular state. Adeoye (2009) was of the opinion that the actions and activities of the Godfathers were responsible for the electoral crisis and violence in some states of Nigeria, particularly Anambra, Oyo State, Kwara State etc. As quoted in Abraham (2003), when Chris Uba declared that “I am the greatest Godfather in Nigeria, in that this is the first time as an individual, I single handedly put in position every elected politician in the state”. Perhaps, this is why Chris Uba was said to have taken his Godson, Dr. Chris Ngige to Ogwugwu shrine at Okija town, to swear an oath of Obedience and allegiance to him as Godfather. This became open when Chris Ngige and his godfather, Chris Uba fell apart because Chris Ngige refused to accept some of the irresponsible persons his Godfather asked him to put into political positions in the state.

In Edo state, Nigeria for example, Governor Igbinedion had a strained relationship with his Godfather Aneneh, this led to the creation of a compelling party structure in the state whereby some of those who were disenchanted with the actions of governor Igbinedion rallied around Aneneh, and this resulted into political warfare against the governor. Also, a similar case was that of Anambra state of Nigeria between Godfather Emeka Offor and Governor Chimarake Mbadinuju in the 1999 – 2003 period.

The most Noticeable and popularized case of godfatherism in Kwara State, Nigeria is another exemplification. This is where one single individual was said to

have been controlling the politics of the state for a very long time. Alhaji Olusola Saraki was known to be the greatest Godfather in the state and he decides whosoever must be in power in the state. He single handedly installed all the governors that have ever ruled Kwara State. He removed Adamu Atta, and Mohammed Lawal 1999 – 2003. This also happened in the case of Oyo State Nigeria between Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu and governor Rashed Ladoja 2003 – 2007.

Again and recently in Edo State, there was a disagreement between Governor Oshomhole and his political Godfather, Chief Igbinedion as a result of non fulfillment of his political and financial agreements. This led to some loyalist to the Godfather to decamp to People Democratic Party of Nigeria (PDP). For a very long time, this resulted to the operation of parallel house of Assembly at the Edo State Legislature, Benin City, Nigeria. The PDP faction claiming to be the authentic house of Assembly, while those loyal to Governor Oshiomhole, moved over to the state government house where they meet to avoid confrontation with those of PDP. As alleged, this development affected the 2015 local government election in Edo State, where the All Peoples Congress of Nigeria (APC) of the ruling party won the whole elections which the people alleged that they were rigged. The outcome of the elections was released even before the elections were conducted. According to Iyayi (2004), and Okoye (2007) the Tribunal nullification of election results which the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had earlier declared is an attestation to the fact that these elections declared by the same INEC in 2007 and 2015 general elections were rigged and falsified.

MONEY BAG POLITICS OR POLITICS OF SETTLEMENT

The Nigerian naira has been reduced to nothing, in such a way that this set of politicians called godfathers are known for sharing money any how, even at the point of voting, they struggle to buy the mind of voters by offering a very huge some of money which they may find difficult to refuse to accept. Since the citizens are hungry and poor, they quickly accept such money and they will be forced to vote to a wrong person, who invariably is the godson of the money bag politician called

Godfather. They have made it impossible for poor people to go into politics. Here, the party electoral Act of 2006 is a good example which provides that the candidates who indicate their interest to contest for political office under the platform of the (PDP) are expected to pay ₦10,000 as fee for intention letter and after this fee, the person can now pay the normal fees depending on what position he wants to contest for, which ranges from ₦10 million for president, ₦1 million for senate, ₦500,000 for house of representatives, ₦3 million for governorship and ₦100,000 for the position of house of Assembly (Okoye, 2007).

From the above, it is very clear that those who do not have surplus and more than the above can not venture elective position in Nigeria. It is still through the activities of these same Godfathers that made it almost impossible for people with integrity to go into politics. They have heightened the price of registration so that they would remain relevant, and since most people who desire to go into politics do not have this kind of money, they would have to run to them, or accept the stringent conditions offered to them. This involves swearing, initiation rites and undertaking of oath of allegiance and obedience at the shrine to seal their agreement and compliance (Abraham 2003).

Another way of securing and consolidating the agreement and compliance with the Godson at the shrine is that they are expected to tender a postdated letter of resignation in the case of infidelity just like the case of Chris Ngige of Anambra State. His Godfather compelled him to resign as governor since he (Ngige) refused to give his Godfather eight out of twelve of the positions of commissioners in the state. Ngige made it clear to his Godfather, that these persons his godfather was demanding must be qualified and must be men of integrity. According to Chris Ngige, his godfather went and gathered some of them from the motor parks which to him were not qualified to be made commissioners. This he said was enfant terrible.

The case of Oyo State, Nigeria is a more laughing matter, it was alleged that Chief Adedibu wanted governor Ladoja to be giving him Ten million naira (N10 million) every month from the security vote, which the governor declined. However,

the bone of contention was the fact that Alhaji Adedibu who was variously known as Godfather of Ibadan politics brought 80 percent of the total number of those to be given political positions in the state to Governor Ladoja. He (Governor Ladoja) who was afraid to say no and could not take a firm decision on this, decided to trick the Godfather that he was going on break abroad, and while he was on the purported break, the state house of Assembly approved the real list he submitted to them before taken off for rest, thereby rejecting the list of the 80 persons nominated by his Godfather. This was the beginning of press war between the two powers.

The disagreement came to real open fight during the 2004 local government election as the loyalist of the two powers confronted themselves in real battle for supremacy and the real owner of the state. In this battle, different dangerous and sophisticated weapons were used and of course many innocent people lost their lives. With the support of power from the centre or presidency, governor ladoja was later impeached by the state House of Assembly which was supported and supervised by chief Adedibu as a mark of superiority.

In all these fight and battle, it is the masses and innocent citizens of the state that suffer. The period that could be used for good governance and proper planning was used for fighting unholy war that does not benefit the state. Secondly, a lot of oil resources were wasted which could have been used for developing the state.

IMPLICATIONS OF GODFATHERISM

Godfatherism is a recent and emerging trend in the Nigerian political process. It is a situation in which an intending candidate must depend on a particular person or group of influential and very wealthy personalities called Godfather in order to win an election. The danger and implication of this is that the contestants no longer rely on their popularity within the electorates but on the whims and caprices of the said godfather for success.

According to Abioye (2007), Godfatherism is a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and a chosen godson. It is a kind of politics where by influential person in a popular or ruling party will assist someone usually a

godson to emerge as the candidate of the party by all cost either by hook or by crook. He will assist him to emerge victorious in the election irrespective of whether he is a popular candidate or not (Aleplika, 2007).

This has become a pestilence to the practice of a true democracy in Nigeria. Godfatherism has become a factor in Nigerian politics in such that very few politicians can achieve success without the rigging influence and support of the godfathers. It is the desire of the politicians to rule at all cost and this has brought in the fact that political leadership in Nigeria now is sold to the highest bidder. This made the godfathers to be rich and exhibit so much political influence within the state. They decide who become the governors, state legislators and senators. They ensure that they get into political offices by all means. Consequently, this has brought in a lot of political fraud and violence at all elections in Nigeria. They are ready to kill and destroy any who stands on their way since they have much money, they are ready to influence the judiciary and the state security operators like the police and others. They have thugs and bodyguards who follow them around to accomplish their evil and wicked desires.

The problem inherent in this practice is that it brings in electoral fraud and violent situation at every election. Women and innocent citizens are most often times murdered during violence. They snatched ballot boxes and bring in wrong figures at every election result. There are so many examples in this regard such as the case of Anambra state during the 1999 and 1983 elections respectively where Dr. Chris Ngige disobeys his godfather, Christ Uba. During the crises that ensued, the governor of the state was kidnapped by ordinary civilians and was forced to relinquish and renounce his position as a governor of the state. Also, in Enugu state during the period of governor Mbadinuju, the schools were closed for more than one year on the ground that there was no money to pay the teachers, meanwhile he was using the state money to service his godfathers. As long as these political sons continue to pay homage to their godfathers, their stay in office is guaranteed regardless of their performance or the people's interest.

The implication of this is that no matter what the electorates complain, that will mean nothing. This activity is translated into bad governance with failure in sociopolitical and economical transformation of the societies, regardless of the huge amount often allocated to the various levels of the government that have not been able to justify such government spending and thus negatively affecting political development in Nigeria. (Obioye, 2000)

This now explains the dominant views and general perception of the people concerning political process and election in Nigeria. The belief and understanding of the people now is that unless one has a particular and very powerful godfather he cannot win an election. Any individual who decides to go on his own without the support and approval of the said godfathers may not be accepted, and when he tries to challenge him, he may even be assassinated and nothing happens. Here, series of examples abound where a particular candidate who indicated interest to contest for a particular elective position was assassinated and nothing heard about it till to day “Who killed Hary Marshal? Who killed the former media security to Edo state Governor? Who killed George Ida?” And a whole lot of others who are victims of the consequences of Godfatherism.

THE NATURE OF NIGERIAN STATE AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

The problem of electoral crisis in Nigeria could only be understood when situated within the contest of Nigerian character or what we may call political economy of the Nigerian state. The idea in Nigeria is that whosoever controlled the state plays a dominant role in the national economy. This also leads to corruption, electoral manipulation and fraud. The resultant effects of this are the problem of underdevelopment, poverty and mis-interpretation of what politics ought to be. They see the state as a primary institution for wealth accumulation, power domination and control (Jega, 2000:30). This made the state not only the biggest spender of resources but also the largest employer of labour.

The character of Nigerian state encourages clientele politics, where the states control opportunities for commerce and a wide range of jobs in every administration.

In this struggle, application and commitment to the rule of public services and ethics of the profession is thrown over board, (Egwu, 2005). The political power becomes license to wealth accumulation and means of securing his position. It is within this contest of the dominant role of the state in the political economy that one can explain the desperation of Nigeria's governing elite for state power as means of manipulation of the electoral processes with all kinds of wickedness and impunity.

The danger of this process explains the reason why the political elite struggle to capture the political position in order to use it for its personal interest. Politics becomes a do or die process and he who gets it or elected has captured all and cannot be poor again. This aspect of Nigerian politics brings in all questionable manners of behavior and weapons into elections. In the bid to win and capture power, they display all kinds of strategies which include killing and destruction of properties and in some cases, the opponents are kidnapped and killed. It makes the Nigerian political process very expensive and costly. The candidates spend a lot of money and even sell their personal belongings in order to win election at all cost. The elections in Nigeria have become a very big business empire and it has become very difficult to prosecute electoral offenders because most of the offenders are protected by the parties.

CONCLUSION

Since the creation of elective principles in Nigeria by Clifford constitution of 1951, the Nigerian electoral processes have been marred by violence and confusion. It was expected that since this country has moved from one government to another, our electoral process should move from lower level to a higher one, though the seed of political discord was sown by British government for their own selfish end. One would have expected the people of Nigeria to understand themselves and unite for the better (Ola, 2007:28). This system of divide and rule policy robbed Nigerians of the common ideology and identity of Nation Building and paved the way for different kinds of leaders we have today. It also gave room for the emergence of different kinds of political parties we have today.

These kind of political parties have given room for the kinds of electoral processes we have and the types of policies that have emerged thereof. The Nigerian politicians certainly have fallen below expectations; it has moved them from violence to more wicked ones. The political elite have often converted the jobless poor and unemployed into ready made tugs for the perpetration of these evil and violent actions. If we examine the political history of Nigeria for the past fifty years, one will find that electoral processes in Nigeria have never had peace and have resulted to death of so many innocent Nigerians. A closer look will show that there were repeated scale of violence and religious disturbances between Christians and Muslims on the other hand and between North versus South on the other side.

Typical examples were the Kano riot and Jos crisis (Clampham 2002). These have often resulted to sectarian killings and violence with particular reference to the case of the middle belt regions namely Benue and Jos areas. The nature of electoral violence in Nigeria has defiled all imaginations and discussions in the sense that it involves political parties and the godfathers, their supporters, journalist, clergymen and in fact government agents or law enforcement agents (Fischer, 2002). This presupposes that electoral violence cut across different stratters of the society. This is not to say that in the developed world like America and Britain, there was no electoral violence. For example in the eighteenth century in England and America, there were cases of electoral violence in which forces, intimidation and killing were intended as means of winning elections (Seymor and Frary 1918:10). This is now history and there is no hope of such history in view in Nigeria. But the Nigerian situation instead is gradually taken a very dangerous tone and method that in a situation where innocent children and even youth coppers sent to serve their father land are murdered in cold blood can not be accepted at all. Electoral system is a means of transition from one government to another and not a period of destruction of life and property. The elite should understand that election is not a do or die affair, if one election is unfavourable, another may be favourable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The truth is that the way a state is built determines the pattern it is going to operate. For a total peace to reign in Nigeria there is need for a holistic reconfiguration of the total apparatus of the state, starting from the leadership.

Those who take decision in Nigeria must make sure that impartiality in an electoral process must be upheld. It is this that determines the credibility of the elections; members of the independent electoral body must be very honest so that elections in Nigeria must be free and fair to restore confidence in its major electoral process. For sometime now, many Nigerians have lost hope in our electoral process. The Nigerians believe that those who win elections are those who belong to the party in power, who are supported by the godfathers. It is only when the elections are totally independent that we can say that the elections are fair and credible.

Finally, the issue of Godfatherism in Nigeria political history should be abrogated and condemned in its entire ramification. The masses should rise up in opposition to this evil trend before it completely destroys our political history.

The constitution should be reviewed and wipe away any section which tend to give room for this ugly situation. Perhaps, if it is possible the civil societies should come together and take up arms against the so called Godfathers, in order to save the generation yet unborn. The society should confront them nakedly and then the evil and danger they represent could be wiped away.

REFERENCES

- Abioye, O. (2011) "Bombing: foreign Airlines planning Boycott of Abuja airport"
The punch September
- Adeoye, O. A (2009) Godfatherism and the future of Nigeria democracy,
African journal of Political science and international Relations Vol, 3 (6)
pp. 268 – 272, June available on line at
<http://wwwacademicjournalorg/AJPSIR>
- Alapiki, H.E (2004). Politics and governance in Nigerian, Port Harcourt: Amthysis
and colleapuss publishers
- Alemika, E.O (2007), "Nigeria security agencies and the 2003 elections: Lessons
for the 2007 elections" in Israc. Albert, Derrick Marco and Victor Adertials
(eds) perspective on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria. Abuja I. DASA.
- Anyebe A.A. (2004) Noun, Development planning and Administration. National
Open University of Nigeria. Ahadu Bello Way Victorious Island Lagos.
- Beigen, J. (2007), "Electoral violence and frugality in Africa. Drawing lessons
from Kenyas Experienced in the 2007, 2008 past election violence" paper
represented as the poster session of the conference on financial market,
Aducent shocks and copying strategies in fragile countries" Accra,
Shama,21-23, 2009
- Clampham,C (2002). "The challenge to state in a globalized world in development
and change Vol.33, No.5, pp775-795.
- Coker, K. O (2004) "Christianity and Godfatherism, lessons from Nigeria
politicians" in fatherism in Nigerian's politic in ESSENCE, on
interdisciplinary international journal on concerned African
Philosophers, vol. 1, No.1 pp 33 – 42.
- Eguen, S (2003) "Electoral violence and democratic project in Nigeria" in
transaction project in Nigeria" in Olasupo B.A (ed), Electoral violence in
Nigeria: issue and perceptions Friedrach Ebert stuffing.
- Fadia and Fadia (2009) Integrity in Administration, Ethics and Values in public
service in India, Salitya Bhanwan publications Agiva 282003.
- Fischer, J (2002) Electoral conflict and violence Washington, D.Ci international
foundation for electoral sibling (IFES)
- Ibrahim, J. (2003) "The rise of Nigeria's godfather" BBC. Focus on African
Magazine Monday, 10 November.

- Ihonvbere, J.O. (2004) “The Obasanjo second, term in office Reinventing and Repositioning Nigeria for growth, stability and Democracy” West Africa Review; Issue 6 available at www.westafricanreview.com/issue6/ihonvbere.html retrieved 08/04/19.
- Istifams, S.Z (2003) Elected malpractices and the threatened to democracy in Nigeria Ibadan: Macmillan publishes
- Iyayi F. (2004) “The conduct of an elections and electoral practices in Nigeria” being A paper delivered at the NBA conference in Abuja on 24th August.
- Jega, A (2002), The state and identity transformation under structured Adjustment in Nigeria Kano. Narashika African institute and create for research and documented
- Kessedman, Metal (2010) introduction to cooperate politics, 5th edition, U.S.A was worth cengape learning
- Khonent, Dirk (2004), Election observation in Nigeria and Madagascar. Diplomatic VS Technologist Bias in review of African political economy, No. 99, Vol.31.
- Kohart, C.R (2009) Research methodologist and techniques (Second Revised Edition) New Delhi: New Age interference Ltd publishers.
- Nnoli, O (2003) Introduction to policies, reversed second Edition. Enugu Snaap press Ltd
- Okoye I (2007) “Political Godfathers, Electoral Politics and Governance in Nigeria” A paper presented at the 65th Anniversary Conference of the MPSA held in Chicago USA between April 12-15 retried from www.allacademic.com//meta/prulaapa.researchcitationaccessedonwednesdaysep02,2009
- Ola, A (2007) “Electoral politics and political violence in Nigeria” omotoso, F, (eds) reading in political behavior, Ondo state university, Ado ekiti press.
- Onueudire, E and Berreind-Dart C (2010) “Breeding the cycle of electoral violence in Nigeria” United state institution of peace, special report, www.usip.org
- Rodney, W. (1974) How Europe underdeveloped Africa, Washington D.C University press.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (1999) Corruption and governance causes, consequences and reform Cambridge University press