

Political Godfatherism and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Political Godfatherism is not entirely a strange concept as it is a phenomenon that has played apparently in infringing on the country's democratic consolidation. It has grown so deeply into the political culture of Nigerian politicians such that it is a political new normal through which the success and relevance of any politician is deduced from the prominent names in support of his or her political ambitions. Hence democratic consolidation suffers as the interests and voices of political godfathers seem to override that of the public. Therefore, this paper examines secondary data extracted from extant literature in journal articles, textbooks, academic researches, government publications and internet materials on the impacts of godfatherism on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper derives its analytical anchorage from the political elite's theory and finds out that the activities of political godfathers affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria in several ways including electoral manipulations and distortion of responsive and transparent governance as well as resulting to non-delivery of the dividends of democracy. Hence, it recommends that electoral umpires should be empowered to stand above the manipulations of political godfathers and that leadership should be made transparently responsible to the common men and there is need for public enlightenment on the debilitating effects of godfatherism on development.

Keywords: *Political Godfatherism, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Corruption*

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Background to the Study

Many countries in the world have in their quest to guarantee high quality and standard of living of their citizens, adopted democratic pattern of administration with notion that democracy is a form of government that assures the protection of and guarantee of the interests, wellbeing, rights and lives of the citizenry (Anyoaha and Chukwu, 2019). This means that democracy succeeds in all climes in enthroning good governance for the growth, and development of the citizenry as well as enfranchising the citizens at every period of credible change of government and decision making.

Democracy has unquestionably demonstrated in many developed democratically governed countries that indeed; it is people centred and inherently development friendly. Norway Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, Finland, Australia and course France and the United States of America are good examples of countries wherein democracy is governing well in the world.

However, the narrative is unfortunately of a sharp contrast in African states. In Nigeria, the focal point of this paper, the democratic space has been seemingly submerged by the phenomenon of political godfatherism to the demeaning of the democratization process in the country as well as the endangering of the socio-economic wellbeing of the citizenry. This is such that the activities of political godfathers hinder the efficient and effective utilization of national wealth, distortion of leadership policies and programmers and stoppage of electorates from voting into power credible candidates of their choices in a bit to satisfy their personal and class gratifications. An apparent anti-democratic political situation strictly adhered to by political godsons in the interest of them continues political relevance. This reality has been maintained into Nigeria's fourth republic as a new political culture. Therefore, since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, Nigeria has been battling with replacing successive governments emerging by the instrumentality of democratic electioneering and yet the clamor for non-realization of democratic dividends and consolidation remains on the increase. This thus, constitutes the crux of this paper to unveil the nature and character of the implications of the phenomenon of political godfatherism on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth Republic.

The Problematique

Nigeria is the largest democracy in the African continent. Joining the committee of democratically governed countries in the world more stably in the fourth republic (1999 till date), the country ought to have demonstrated an appreciable level of democratic development by way of demonstrating reasonable indicators of its consolidation through well entrenched democratic principles , practices and institutions to translate into good governance, development and guarantee of citizens enjoyment of their full rights, liberties and freedoms as it seen in many successful democracies such as of the united states of America (USA). However, over two decades down the lane in the fourth republic, democracy cannot be said to have been consolidated safely in Nigeria. This poses a threat to the workability of democracy as a globally celebrated form of government in ensuring the greatest good of the greatest number despite its remarkable successes in other parts of the world. This means that it

would not be entirely out of reasonable contemplations to conclude that there is more to the successes of other democratic countries than merely being democratic.

Aggravating this puzzle and its attendant desire to delve into democratic consolidation in Nigeria, is the presence and activities of political godfathers in Nigeria's politicalcum democratic space. Godfathers ordinarily should properly and appropriately provide guidance to their godsons towards navigating the ship of the Nigerian state towards democratic consolidation and development through good governance. Contrarily, godfatherism is perceivably one of the key factors responsible for malfunctioning democratic institutions and anti-democratic practices in Nigeria. They seem to provide a negative orientation that election being a key ingredient of democracy as a leadership recruiting platform, is a “do or die” affair. They also demonstrate that money and influence are the holy determinants of success in democratic contestations against public acceptability and that politicians must join confraternities or resort to diabolic politicking in order to be relevant in a democracy. Therefore, this paper sets out to examine political godfatherism and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic to ascertain the nature, character and extent of the influence of the former on the latter.

Conceptual Clarifications

Political Godfatherism

Ajayi (2006) contends that a 'godfather' is a kingmaker, boss, mentor and principal, while godson is the beneficiary and the recipient of the legacy of a godfather. A godfather is someone who has built unimaginable respect and followers in the community, and possessed a well-organized political platform, and general acceptance from all and sundry. Ayodele (2007) argues that the godfatherism, in its simple form is a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and godson. Political godfathers are powerful individuals who determine who gets what, when and how, in the corridors of power. The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is that when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined. This has seemingly turned democracy in Nigeria to form of prebendalism and plutocracy with elements of election.

The activities of political godfathers in Nigeria's fourth republic can be likened to that of society mafias as they also display violent scheming and diabolic politicking in order to have their way by any means. In other words, the Machiavellian principle of 'the end justifies the means' underpin their modus operandi. Godfathers are inspired by their resolution to regulate public policies in favor of their concerns. For instance, political/public appointments and plundering the coffers of the state. They are in advantaged positions to decide the political confidence of candidates to political offices and as such those that are not only seen but confirmed to be “loyal” cannot be “given” ticket to be the flag bearer of the parties. This is to ensure that the godsons will be answerable to them when they were elected into power. Because of these conditions, some contenders defect to other parties where they do not have such influential figures that would aggravate them from their political ambitions (Fatima and

Mustapha, 2019). Therefore, the concept of political godfatherism connotes sponsorship of contestants in an election by a wealthy and influential individual or group who in return expects protection and other forms of reward and privileges. Put simply, it is a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and a godson.

Democracy

Democracy as a system of government is historically traceable to the city states of ancient Greece of Athens and Sparta. Onubi (2002) defined democracy as “rule by the people”. This conforms to Lincoln's definition as government of the people, by the people and for the people. Therefore, it means government of the majority. Ademola (2009) argued that there is no uniformity of views among scholars on the meaning of the concept of democracy. Yet, there is consensus on the original attributes of democracy which include; people, freedom, and authority. For Schumpeter (1947), democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to govern them. By this, democracy implies conducting elections and choosing leaders that will represent the majority. Rousseau and Rivero (2003) see democracy as the power of the people as it manifests in ways of thinking, behaving, and organizing that enhance participation in and influence over the decisions affecting their everyday lives. This kind of process can come through, public debate, election and representation-building of consensus and formidable decision-making. From the foregoing therefore, this paper deduces democracy to mean a system of government where governmental power rests with the consent of the people. It is a form of government rooted in public participation, rule of law, equality and freedom of the citizens from emergence to policy implementations.

Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democratic consolidation means a deliberate political process in a polity by which democracy is “so broadly and profoundly legitimized among its citizens that it very unlikely to break down” (Nwokeke & Jayum, 2011). This means a stable democracy that is not easily disrupted and overthrown by other forms of government. Democratic consolidation requires attitudinal and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty. It springs from good governance which encompasses accountability, security of human rights and civil liberties, devolution of powers and respect for local autonomy, the absence of which constitute a challenge to democratic regimes (Eyinla, 2000). Democratic consolidation therefore is defined as the process in which democratic practices in which democratic practices and institutions mature in a society in a manner that its reversal is difficult. This means democracy in all ramifications and indices becomes so enshrined in a polity that its citizens accept it not just as a political system but as a way of life and hence unlikely to tolerate otherwise.

Corruption

The world corruption comes from the Latin verb “corruptus” meaning “to break”. This suggests that corruption means any act that breaks apart, deviates or offends the law of a community. In political parlance, corruption is the abuse of public trust by public office-holders. This way, Huntington (1968) defines it as the behavior of public officials that deviates

from the accepted norms in order to serve a private end. From the above, we deduce that corruption is any deliberate use of public office or resources to achieve personal gains.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the political elite theory of Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels, Vilfredo Pareto, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Joseph Schumpeter and a host of others. The major assumptions of elite theory are that in every society there is, and must be a minority which rules over rest of the society, and this minority forms the political class or governing elite composed of those who occupy the posts of political command and more regularly those who can directly influence political decisions (Osakede and Ijimakinwa, 2016). To suit, an elitist correlation to the understanding of godfatherism is very apt. that godfathers are synonymous with the elites. For him, elites in the political spheres are in the Nigerian context, political godfathers. They are the ones who govern, and are known as the kingmakers, the notables and often seen as strongmen who control every sphere of a society's political life.

While the arguments of the elite's scholars can be said to be suitable in explaining political realities in most democracies, the theory has been attacked for postulating that every society has a class of few who govern and a majority who are governed. That these few are unanimous in seeking the general good of the society and are hence solely responsible for every government decision and policy. This is critiqued on grounds that government policies and programmes are not only determined by the elites but by several other factors both of internal and external origins and that it is not true of the elites being unanimous in seeking the public good.

Amidst the criticism, the political elite's theory is still relevant as it explains leadership, its nature as well as the character displays of the political class. Thus, the theory is relevant for this study on political godfatherism and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic. Its stratification of the society suits Nigeria's reality as the elite's class in the Nigerian context can be said to be the class of political godfathers who through their political influence, knowledge and wealth, influence the management of the Nigerian state first in their personal interests and then class aggrandizement. Hence, Nigeria's political system her democratic consolidation is but a victim of the manipulations of an elite-like class and phenomenon of political godfatherism in the country.

Godfatherism and Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation

The phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigerian political space is traceable to the 1960s, and early post-independence era where leaders became political godfathers (Fatima and Mustapha, 2019; Mamah, 2004). Alabi and Tunde (2013) supported this when they pointed out that the political godfather phenomenon started during the first republic when the leading supporters of Nigeria's independence such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, etc. emerged to manage political activities in Nigeria. The actions of godfathers became more pronounced with the coming of civilian rule in 1979. However, they were lessened in power and influence by the military governments that beclouded the political space of the 1980s. The inception of the fourth republic in 1999 also

witnessed godfatherism phenomenon from as soon after the governors were sworn into offices. The political actors and their political godfathers apparently contended “who is who” across various states in the federation. Prominent among such power shows include senator Ali M0du Sheriff and Governor Mala Kachalla of Borno; Olusola Saraki and governor Mohammed Lawal (Lt) of Kwara state; senator Jim Nwobodo and governor Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu state; Chief Emeka Offor and governor Chinwoke Mbadinju of Anambra state; Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso of kano state and Lamidi Adebibu and governor Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo state (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2016).

The philosophical underpinning of political godfatherism in the first republic was to offer their godsons the needed nationalistic orientations and anchorage in their deliberate commitment to ensuring that wheels of the Nigerian state is steered towards development within the light of global best democratic practices. Observably, godfatherism in the fourth republic is anchored on a different philosophy from what was obtainable in the first republic. here, political godfathers are carefree of the wellbeing and development of Nigeria and do not desire fame in the manner of their first republic counterparts but by maintaining their relevance through ensuring that their godsons dance strictly to their selfish tone in order to accomplish their equally selfish political aspirations (Fatima and Mustapha, 2019).

Godfatherism is in Nigeria fourth republic politics, a debilitating phenomenon. It is rooted in cultural values of the Nigerian society, where it is purely socio-economic in nature and mutually productive for the beneficiaries and they reign across all spheres of the society: academics, legal, traditional and religious environment. Its politicization appears to have contributed to the fierce political contestations as well as its criminalization (Abdullahi \$ Tunde, 2013). Therefore, despite the clamor for true democracy in Nigeria so as to improve the political and socio-economic existence of the country through popular participation in governance, the desire of political godfathers to hold and exercise political and socio-economic powers at all levels, has steadily turned down every effort to that effect.

The implications of Political Godfatherism on Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation

Political Godfatherism is undoubtedly of cardinal nexus with Nigeria's persistent unfruitful democratic consolidation struggles. This is because by and large, anywhere democracy is effectively and efficiently consolidated, it is as a result of the deliberate and conscious political calculations of the elites as argued by Osakede and Ijimakinwa, (2016) who within the context of the Nigerian political space are referred to as godfathers. Thus, democratic consolidations' failure is not only suggestive of leaders' incapacitation to achieve it but that either by commission or omission, they contribute to the crisis of democratic consolidation in the country for one reason or the other. To this end, political godfatherism in Nigeria has impacted negatively on democratic consolidation in a number of ways as discussed further.

1. Electoral manipulation: key to the tenets of every successful democracy is election. It is a democratic instrument and medium through which democratic leadership is begotten and hence its credibility is as important as the quality of the leadership it produces. Unfortunately, in the context of Nigeria's fourth republic, the activities of political godfathers have derailed election of its credibility and validity in leadership

recruitment and there by imposing candidates of their choices on the generality of the citizens. This they do by sponsoring electoral thuggery, rigging, vote buying and influencing officials of the electoral umpire.

2. Distortion of responsive and transparent governance: in a democracy, governance is responsive and transparent to the people. This is necessitated by the fact that the people are the ones who by their thumbs through the ballot, produce the leadership and hence their plight is often responded to transparently by their government. But because godfathers manipulate election to determine election winners, the loyalty of leaders have been governance and political stability which are predicated on rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in management of state resources.
3. Deterrence of democratic dividends: one major negative impact of political godfatherism in Nigeria's polity is the fact that it makes government unable to deliver dividends of democracy. This is because the resources for national development is syphoned by both political godfathers and their godsons as pretends that they are. Thus, these resources are rather used for private gains.

Conclusion

Democracy is incontestably a system of government that has not only been consolidated effectively in other parts of the world but has created the required leadership, institutions, principles and practices that have contributed immensely to the transformation of those societies as well as the quality of living conditions of their people. This is not the experience in the Nigerian state especially in the fourth republic as democracy has not yet been effectively and efficiently consolidated and institutionalized to create such a development friendly context it has created elsewhere. This is an aberration that is attributed to the nihilistic political activities of godfathers in Nigeria's democracy.

Political godfathers do not only influence leadership decisions but have hijacked state power and use same by their installed godsons in various leadership positions to pursue, achieve and aggrandize their self-pleasing interests. This way, anything development is seemingly accidental rather than being a product of deliberate leadership efforts as the leaders are preoccupied with seeking to advance, protect and achieve the interests of their political godfathers using the state resources. Furthermore, cardinal indicators of democracy and democratic consolidation such as free, fair and credible elections, good governance, transparency, and accountability, rule of law, freedom, independence o judiciary and freedom of the press among others are either not there or exist only in nomenclatures. These must be addressed for democracy to be consolidated and result to the very essence for its choice as a form of government.

Recommendations

From its submissions and conclusion on the impacts of political godfatherism on democratic consolidation, the paper recommends generally that the phenomenon of political godfatherism is a cancer that has arrested and is killing democratic consolidation in Nigeria and hence all Nigerians of all socio-political cum economic classes should deliberately rise to cut it off in order liberate the country's political system of its grips. More specifically, the paper recommends that:

- i. The electoral umpires in Nigeria which are the independent national electoral commission (INEC) at the federal level and states independent electoral commissions at the various states should be strengthened and empowered to be independent enough to conduct elections free from the manipulations of political godfathers in the country. When they are properly funded, well equipped, trained and remunerated, they can withstand the juicy temptations of these godfathers to lure them into adulterating election results against the choices of the people. This way, elections will reflect that true decision of the people and people's leadership will emerge through it and hence, set the pace for democratic consolidation.
- ii. Leadership should be respectful and transparent to the people. Leaders as a matter of necessity should in their policies and programmes be responsive to the plight of the citizens at all times in a transparent manner. This is because they are in government as representatives of the generality of the people and not just the powerful and wealthy few who supported their electoral biddings. Leadership should ensure the society is predicated on rule of law, due process, accountability, transparency and meritocracy rather than favoritism and unequal treatments. The people will this way be given a sense of belonging, be more loyal to government and a harmonious society where development can thrive will be built.
- iii. Delivery of democracy to the people. Dividends of democracy such as provision of social and infrastructural services as well as government's commitment to human capacity development are major indicators of a responsible government. Therefore, government should ensure that within its span of stay in office, it is able to deliver appreciable benefits of democracy of the people. National resources should be used to address the needs of the people rather than be committed to serving interests.
- iv. Laws should also be enacted for the prohibition of godfatherism in Nigeria's politics. Those who offend such laws should be barred from political activities.
- v. There should be massive political orientations to enlighten general public on the debilitating effects of political godfatherism on democratic consolidation and the overall development of the nation.
- vi. Finally, upcoming politicians should be encouraged to eschew positive moral and good political values to earn the massive support of the public rather than seeking to be groomed and brought up by seasoned and established politicians. This way, they will be able to govern and not be used by those who would bring them up.

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