

**ABSTRACT**

*Parties with varying ideologies have long defined Nigeria's politics, yet one common thread remains: godfatherism. It's a system in which powerful, wealthy individuals (godfathers) back politicians (godsons) to control the politics of specific regions, leveraging their influence and resources to shape election outcomes. The same scenario also applies to the 2023 general election in Nigeria, in which the results reflect the influence of godfathers in determining candidate selection, party primaries, and electoral outcomes. In the 2023 general election, godfatherism played a significant role, with prominent figures like Bola Ahmed Tinubu, perceived as a godfather, backing candidates and shaping the political narrative. This phenomenon undermines democratic processes, perpetuates corruption, and prioritizes personal interests over public welfare. Nigeria's federal system, with power split between federal, state, and local governments, inadvertently created an environment where godfatherism could thrive. Godfathers shaped Nigeria's politics by influencing candidate picks, party structures, and policy-making, fueling a hierarchical and centralized system. Research into the 2023 general election shows godfatherism intertwined political power with economic interests, with significant socio-economic consequences. The research pinpointed fairness, transparency, and representation as key principles undermined by godfatherism in Nigeria's democracy. Elections were compromised, party primaries were manipulated, and candidates imposed, fueling godfatherism. The 2023 general election shows this trend continues, with transparency lacking in Nigeria's democracy. This paper used an analytical approach to interrogate the godfatherism concept in the Nigerian political landscape.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian Politics, Godfatherism, Electoral Success, and 2023 General Election.

---

<sup>1</sup> Political Science Department, Ajayi Crowther University 08075669915

### Introduction

The reality of the political landscape of Nigeria was anchored on some prominent personalities. Moreover, the political history of Nigeria is diverse in terms of geopolitical zone, ethnic group, religion, culture, and system of governance. Nigeria's political history is marked by periods of colonial rule, independence, military interventions, and a transition to a democratic republic. There are many interruptions to the Nigerian political journey immediately after gaining independence in 1960, the nation faced ethnic tensions, a civil war (1967-1970), and multiple military regimes. Finally, in 1999, Nigeria transitioned to a democratically elected civilian government to the present date. As a democratic country, Nigerian citizens have significant political freedom to exercise their right by electing representatives who make decisions on their behalf. Perhaps, they have the liberty to fundamental rights, such as freedom of assembly, association, speech, and the right to vote.

The election process in Nigeria is subject to a multi-party system. Nigeria's political landscape begins with British colonial influence, starting with the creation of a consulate in the Bights of Benin and Biafra to

curb the slave trade. This led to increasing British involvement in the political and economic life of the region. The Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated to form the single colony of Nigeria, primarily for economic reasons. Fortunately, the British established a federal system with regional assemblies and elections leading to the 1959 election that determined the first independent government. History revealed that Nigeria gained its independence in 1960. This development establishes a federal parliamentary system with an elected prime minister and a ceremonial head of state, who is Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Moreover, in 1963, Nigeria became a republic, with Nnamdi Azikiwe as the first president, and he served as the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1963 to 1966. In 1966, the country experienced a military coup, which led to the suspension of the democratic process and the establishment of a military government. According to Tamuno (1972), he asserts that Nigeria has been at the forefront in gravitating in a spiral of political violence due to a political personality known as godfatherism that uses politics as a mechanism towards achieving their economic and political wealth. Since

Nigeria's independence in 1960, several elections have been conducted on the platform of the political parties, and each political parties have prominent personality, also known as a 'godfather' who shaped and tailored the country's political landscape for personal benefit. Among the significant political parties in the history of Nigeria are: The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG), which were prominent in the First Republic (1960-1966). The Second Republic (1979-1983) saw the rise of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and the Nigerian People's Party (NPP). The People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominated much of the

Fourth Republic, while the All-Progressives Congress (APC) has been a significant force in recent years. All the aforementioned political parties have their own dictate. The history of elections in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period when the country was a British colony. The first election held in Nigeria was the 1951 general election, which was held under the Lyttleton Constitution. This election marked the beginning of a new era in Nigerian politics, as it was the first time that Nigerians were allowed to participate in

the democratic process and elect their own leaders. In the early years of independence, Nigeria was a federal parliamentary democracy, with the prime minister serving as the head of government and the governor-general serving as the head of state. The country held regular general elections every four years, and political parties played a central role in the electoral process.

Over the years, Nigeria's political landscape has undergone numerous changes. The military government ruled Nigeria for more than three decades until the return to civilian rule in 1999. The 1999 general election marked the beginning of a new era in Nigerian politics, as it marked the end of military rule and the return to civilian democracy. The election was held under the supervision of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which was established to oversee the electoral process and ensure that it was free and fair. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for organizing and conducting elections. It is responsible for registering voters, preparing and distributing voting materials, and announcing the results of elections. Significantly, any political party

can always uphold her victory though election process.

Since the return to civilian rule, Nigeria has held several general elections, including 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections. These elections have been characterized by a high level of competition and have generally been considered to be free and fair. The electoral process is facing some challenges, such as vote-rigging and electoral fraud. There have been several instances of these practices being reported, particularly in the early years of independence. However, in recent years, there have been significant efforts to address these issues through the introduction of biometric voting systems and the deployment of international observers to monitor the electoral process. Another significant challenge facing the electoral process in Nigeria has been the issue of violence and intimidation. There have been instances of violence and intimidation during and after elections, with some candidates and their supporters resorting to illegal and violent means to gain an advantage. This has led to concerns about the safety of voters and the integrity of the electoral process. Despite these challenges, Nigeria's electoral process has made significant progress in recent years,

and the country has held several free and fair elections. This has contributed to the strengthening of democracy in the country and has helped to foster political stability and economic growth. However, the aforementioned electoral process challenges are not the primary aim of this study.

This study intends to uphold the history of elections in Nigeria, which has been marked by both progress and challenges. While there have been instances of electoral success through the involvement of prominent individuals, known as 'godfatherism'. In essence, the study is designed to investigate the role of godfatherism in the electoral success of the 2023 general election in Nigeria. However, the result of the study will be channeled towards improving the electoral system for the purpose of strengthening democracy in the country. The historical journey, dynamism and diversity of Nigeria's Political structures made it complex for the researcher to engage a particular methodology. Apparently, scholars in field of Nigeria's politics such as, Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939), Thovoethin, P.S (2004), and Onubi, A. (2002) outlined diverse approaches that are quite appropriate for the study of Nigeria's democracy. They were multi-

faceted, multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional. Significantly, the dynamic nature of the Nigeria's democracy requires unconventional approach in conducting research, gathering information and reporting on the electoral success during the 2023 general election in Nigeria. However, a multi-dimensional approach is considered and adopted as appropriate for carrying out the field-work for this present research. Moreover, a variety of theories and mythologies were revealed and designed as the best for the current study.

### **Content of 2023 General Election**

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria marked a significant period for evaluating the performance of political parties and godfatherism in the country. These elections included the presidential, gubernatorial, and legislative elections, with the participation of major parties like the All-Progressives Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP), as well as other smaller parties. Historically, Nigeria's political scene has been dominated by two major parties: The All-Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). However, the 2023 elections

witnessed the emergence of the Labour Party (LP) as a disruptive "third force," signaling growing voter dissatisfaction with the traditional parties. Additionally, smaller regional parties like the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) also gained attention in specific areas, reflecting Nigeria's diverse and fragmented political landscape. (Ajayi, 2025).

The practice of 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. Augustine (2023). Scholars' submission on the practice of godfatherism in the Nigerian political arena suggests an epidemic in the Nigerian political system. 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 (Azees, 2014).

Further findings also reveal scholars' interest in discussing the Nigerian godfatherism political concept from pre-colonial times to contemporary times. However, the majority of these studies do not dwell on specific electoral success in Nigeria. Rather, they find interest in highlighting the specific consequences on Nigeria's democracy. Abundant literature has been documented on the negative aspect of godfatherism ideology on Nigeria's political scene as if there are no contemporary developments that have revolutionized the godfatherism concept in the Nigerian political landscape.

The submission of Onubi, A. (2002) portrays the causes, nature, and effects of godfatherism on Nigeria's democracy. He further stressed that political godfatherism in Nigeria is responsible for weak institutions in the country. He concludes that political godfathers and godsons have denied the people the right to vote for their preferred candidates as their leaders. This is a true reflection of today's Nigerian politics. This review is based mainly on the examination of literature on the Nigerian political terrain and

the electoral success recorded as a result of godfatherism in the 2023 general election.

The study gathered existing and enriching scholarly submissions on the reality practices of godfatherism in Nigeria. Among the scholars whose studies were made specifically on godfatherism in Nigeria is Nkwede, Ibeogu, and Nkwede (2014). Their assertion reveals that godfatherism is not a recent phenomenon in the political history of Nigeria. They further explained that godfatherism's involvement in Nigeria's politics has eroded government credibility and rendered citizens' electoral worth void. Furthermore, they put forward a definition of godfatherism as the political merchant, while the political godson is the slave who is brought with a huge amount of money under a democratic oath. They further conclude that godfatherism is amongst the most dangerous challenges to Nigeria's democracy today, and it persists only with the help of the government, resulting in unresponsive leadership.

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. Ohiole & Ojo (2016) submit that Nigeria's democracy is not yet completely developed, and the phenomenon of godfatherism has jeopardized the political process as well as citizens' livelihood. Moreover, the submissions portray Nigeria's democracy since 1999 as 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 due to the major concept of godfatherism. Multiple political parties and frequent and competitive elections, which would otherwise be called minimum requirements for democratic rule, have not resulted in a corresponding flourishing liberal ideals that are vital to democracy's survival.

### **Godfatherism in Nigerian politics**

In Nigeria's political scene, "godfathers" refer to powerful, wealthy individuals who sponsor political candidates, seeing it as a pathway to amplifying their social and economic clout.

These influential figures often wield significant sway over the politicians they back. Significantly, 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. Unfortunately, the godfathers ensure that party officials are overregulated to advance their own roles within the party. As a result, a variety of factors are responsible for godfathers' flourishing in Nigeria's political arena.

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 Olawale (2005). He posits that the term 'godfather' appears as a parenthesis system in the political landscape of Nigeria. The patron-client relationships that popularized the Nigerian political arena as a local equivalence in core ethnic groups in Nigeria, namely, Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. The godfatherism scenario has been in

practice since the pre-colonial era. The pre-colonial patron-client prebendaries, on the other hand, were quickly carried over to Nigeria's post-colonial arrangement.

However, Olawale continues to assert that "the founding fathers of Nigerian party politics were godfathers. During the pre-colonial era, the traditional rulers were the leading figures, and they became the focal point of the British indirect rule policy. Onubi. A. (2002). 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. Moreover, Bello, who led the NPC, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who led the AG, and Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC leader.

The study also highlighted Mallam Aminu Kanu and Alhaji Waziri as the elder statesmen who fall into the aforementioned Nigerian political group. Obviously, the aforementioned political leaders are

determinants of the political appointees in the geopolitical regions they ruled. According to Ugwu, Izueke & Obasi (2013). They espoused that the above-mentioned political godfathers produce political godsons in their respective region: 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. The study revealed that 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 heavyweights' unrestricted ability to control the political landscape, manipulate candidate victories (the godsons/daughters), and determining policy and program direction remained a major factor in Nigeria's political

culture. Furthermore, Adeoye, O. A (2009) argued that ‘it got so bad under the watchful eyes of Obasanjo-led government that godfather adopted various titles, such as gangsters, and mafia.

According to Adeoye, under President Obasanjo’s democratic rule, the worst manifestation of godfatherism in Nigerian history came to life, and it still exists to date. The majority of perceived godfathers in Nigerian politics exhibited features of Marianism. This makes them behave like an emperor in their geopolitical zone. The manifestation of godfatherism under President Obasanjo can be channeled to political crises that happened in Oyo State between godfather and godson (Adedibu and Ladoja).

Eventually, the godfather unseats the then Oyo State Governor: His Excellency, Senator Adewolu Rashidi Ladoja (Now Imperial Majesty, Oba (Sen) Adewolu Rashidi Ladoja, The Olubadan of Ibadan). Fortunately, Ladoja got the governorship mandate back through court intervention. Similarly, Lagos State is also a veritable example of godfatherism in South-west, Nigeria. The former governor of Lagos State (Akinwunmi Ambode) is also a beneficiary of godfatherism, just like his

predecessor and successor. Due to Nigeria’s presents godfather structure, the country’s devastating legacies of Ibrahim Babangida (1985 to 1993), Sanni Abacha (1993 to 1998) and Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 to 2007), Umaru Musa Yar’Adua (2007 to 2010), Goodluck Jonathan (2010 to 2015), Muhammadu Buhari (2015 to 2023) and Bola Tinubu (2023 till date) reflect godfatherism concept in all level of administration. 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.

### **Theoretical Review**

The elite theory has been identified and adopted to be appropriate to interrogate the present study. The theory is to examine the domineering relevance of godfatherism on Nigeria’s emerging democracy, focusing on the 2023 general election in Nigeria. The theory of elite on one hand upholds that power is shared among the elites at regular intervals and at the detriment of the electorate or the masses. Pareto (1935) submissions are appropriate to this. He asserted that political elites shield and disassociate themselves from society, attempting to reproduce themselves

as much as possible from within. He further stressed that, they do everything necessary within their influence and control to ensure that non-elites do not enter their membership.

The political elites keep a safe, functional distance from the rest of society.

Moreover, they replicate themselves on an individual and selective basis in a method, which he (Pareto) explicitly referred to as the circulation of elites. 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 sabotage efforts at collective circulation of elites as contrast to promotion of individual recruitment.

Mosca (1939) on the other hand, disagree with Pareto that elite recruiting can only be done on a personal level. He further argues that one social class should replace another and that non-elite members can enter class through a process known as collective social mobility, which include the social, economic, and professional status that people achieve as a result of their efforts. Mosca, also assert that a group of people known as the sub-elite exist 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.

Base on this, both sub-elite and non-elite Nigerians can be recruited into the political elite class. However, according to the elite theory, the elites' classes in the political arena are the individuals who rule or govern the state and national wealth and hold key roles in political administration system. In view of this, 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 Nigerian political landscape. The necessity of this elite theory on this present paper is anchored on its potential to explain how politics of godfatherism facilitates the transformation of individuals into the political elite class.

## JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

Liberalism, as we have seen in Nigeria, foster extreme elitist democracy and a money-driven electioneering structure, putting the populace as onlookers and continues to deny Nigerians much-needed institutional, political and socio-economic advancement. The elite theory is structures especially on the premise that elite behaviour has a casual impact on the society.

Elite theory ideology, according to Mosca, refer 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 well-being of the people is blatantly scarified 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. The resurgence of godfatherism in Nigeria posed a serious obstacle to political dividends, socio-economics 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 votes are expected to openly nominate someone who rule them and serve their interests.

The major application of the current theory is to compare the godfatherism ideology to the electoral success of the 2023 general election in Nigeria. The elite theory is quite appropriate for this thesis with the aim of examining and justifying the godfatherism impacts towards electoral success in Nigeria, using the 2023 general election as the case study. The positive and negative impacts of the godfatherism will be studied and analyzed during the field work of the current study.

Moreover, political godfathers at the three level of government will be examined in respect of the electoral success of the 2023 general election in Nigeria. With clear and visual evidence, it has been observed and concluded that the Nigerian political terrain has been over-shadow by some individuals who dictate and control the politician at the various level government in Nigeria. The theory chosen (Elite) is considered relevant and appropriate for the current study based on its definition and perception. However, the theory chosen only for the purpose of interrogating od specific aspects. Especially

that, the study is not rigidly tied to a particular theory.

### **The causes, nature and effects of godfatherism on the 2023 general election success in Nigeria**

The phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigeria is not new. It's been around way before 1999.

However, the present paper focus on the issue of godfatherism and its impact on the 2023 general elections. Nigeria's democratic governance has some unaddressed issues, highlighted by the flawed 2023 elections.

Challenges to democratic consolidation at federal, state, and local levels since 1999 are widespread.

The study explored how "godfathers" impact Nigeria's democratic progress. Godfathers often hijack power, handpicking candidates and undermining fair elections and the rule of law. The study used a historical approach, applying Marx Weber's power theory. It analyzed primary sources (oral interviews,

newspapers) and secondary sources (books, magazines, online publications) to understand the subject matter. In line with the Nigeria perspective as regards democracy: Democracy's supposed to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people". Unfortunately, it's got a twist – godfatherism's influencing the game. Nigeria's democracy journey: started with Western influence, shifted from parliamentary to presidential... and now we're dealing with godfatherism's dark side.

Godfatherism's roots go way back – it's an age-old game, played differently depending on where you are and who's playing. Godfathers play different roles: in the Catholic Church, they're mentors; in France, economic influencers; and in some American movies, they're like crime bosses with government ties. Godfatherism's global, with influence in politics. It's also rooted in cultural traditions, predating current systems.

## **JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)**

The reason why Nigerian politics have become corrupted is that the godfathers hold all the power and are using deceitful tactics to maintain their authority. Godfathers bankroll candidates, buy votes, and turn Nigeria's politics into an auction – whoever pays the most gets the seat. Their influence also covers the electoral offices, such as the independent election bodies, including federal and state. The weakness of such institutions as the judiciary and electoral bodies are a severe impediment leading to the masses' apathy to the general conduct and operations of the system.

It is essential to observe that certain factors have contributed to the creation and survival of the above phenomenon. Poverty, which is the most dangerous of the black race problem, might be considered primary in this regard. Many young and older people, desperate to

hold political positions but having no resources to acquire them, resort to the patronage of a godfather. Coupled with this is society's gross unemployment of both old and young. Since the political arena can accommodate people from all spheres of life, the unemployed find refuge quickly and comfortably in politics, leading to pitching their tent anywhere provided they are accepted.

Therefore, asserting that every political officeholder in Nigeria is a godfather is not out of place. Godfathers occupy the entire nation. Godfathers are persons or institutions that empower their client or godson to settle a political position and should, in return, obey the dictates of the godfather. In Nigeria, the agreement had exceeded mere words to the sealed agreement in a shrine involving oath-taking. The godfather sometimes taught their godson, which in most states had resulted in a

crisis of great consequence, destroying public and private properties worth millions of naira.

Godfathers generally usurp the power of the electorates, which negates the principle of democracy, which the godfathers are standing on its tripod to operate. Democracy recognizes the masses as the recipient of democratic values, enjoying free and fair elections and expecting political appointments and other dividends of democracy to be shared equitably. The desired virtues are not demonstrated by the godfather who, instead, operates in every facet of manipulative technique, robbing the electorates. Moreover, this study shall attempt to capture the nature of the Nigerian godfathers and their performance in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Nigeria's 2023 general election showcased a vibrant multiparty system, with the All-Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) emerging as the

dominant forces. The APC's Bola Tinubu won the presidential election, while the party also secured key governorships and legislative seats. The PDP, on the other hand, maintained a strong presence, winning several governorships and a significant number of legislative seats. Other notable parties that made an impact in the 2023 election include the Labour Party (LP), New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), and All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The election also saw a diverse range of candidates vying for office, with many young people and women participating in the electoral process.

However, before the 2023 general election, there was a high level of the manifestation of the Godfather show in Nigeria. President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, described as a kingmaker, had established his posture to take over from President Buhari long before he became Nigeria's President, hence the slogan-'emilokan,' That is, "it is my turn." That

## JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

slogan was manifest during the presidential campaign, and many Nigerians who did not understand the full import of that slogan did not take it seriously.

But those who understood described him as a kingmaker who wanted to be a king. Nigerian Political analysis affirms that in Nigeria, the power broker determines who becomes the President, which was what prevailed in the 2023 general election. The election's outcome was not based on qualification but on the godfather's decision. That is evident in the fact that godfathers sometimes are not just one person but a group of persons, sometimes called a cabal.

Before becoming Nigeria's President, Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu, popularly known as Jagaban, meaning 'leader of warriors' (a title awarded to him by an emir in the north), had served as Governor of Lagos state from where he acquired the tact of a godfather. He had successfully produced his boys as Lagos State

Governors after him, from His Excellency Fasola to the incumbent Governor, Jide Sam Olu. An attempt by His Excellency Ambode to assert his authority in Lagos politics by challenging Tinubu's establishment cost him a second term in office as Lagos Governor. He also has towering political influence across the Yoruba States and has since been regarded as the godfather of the entire southwest Nigeria. President Ahmed Bola Tinubu is a first-class godfather in Nigeria, with enormous wealth and fame, and his tentacles are spread all over Nigeria, resulting in his winning the APC presidential primary and the general election. Despite several allegations against him, he was inaugurated as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, an instance of the ills of godfatherism and the exercise of power as was enunciated by Marx Weber.

Likewise, the paper also considered Alhaji Atiku Abubakar as another prominent

## **JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)**

godfather who played a vital role in the 2023 general election in Nigeria. He was a governor of Adamawa state in 1990, 1996, and 1998 before ascending to vice president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999 and being re-elected in 2003. After this, he has been contesting the presidency six consecutive times without success. In 2007, he competed under the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN.

He tried again in 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, but to no avail. In building up to the People's Democratic Party's Presidential Primary Election in 2022, before the 2023 general election, Atiku and his team advised the party not to emulate the APC in their zoning of the presidential slot to the south. To suit his ambition, he lobbied against zoning, which in the end favoured his chances of being the presidential candidate of the PDP. He played the godfather role in the party that led to the stepping down of many contenders, the

aftermath of which was the withdrawal of many stakeholders, including the G-5 Governors. This situation cost the PDP a significant disorder that was not cured even before the election. The problem was not limited to that; all the political bigwigs in Nigeria are godfathers at their various levels. Significantly, Godfatherism as a phenomenon has erected a firm tap root in the political life of Nigeria. It has almost become indispensable, suggesting that it can only be developed instead of attempting to erase it. It has devastating effects on true democracy. Hence, its operations negate proper democratic practices, including free, fair and credible elections, the appointment of people-oriented leaders and recognition of the position of the electorates in a democratic setting.

The 2023 general election showed that godfatherism is becoming more sophisticated in its operations and a disservice to society.

That was evident from the primary to the main general election. They have displayed and continue to display so much money and power and manipulate the electoral process. Decamping of members from one party to the other involving campaigns of calumny and hate speeches both in the social media and conventional media, and open-air rallies involving thugs were experienced. Yet, there seems to be a great level of agreement instead of coercion in settling political issues to avoid violence, creating the hope that democracy is evolving in Nigeria.

### **The impact of godfatherism and relationship between the godfathers and their godsons as demonstrated during the 2023 general election success.**

The godfather-godson dynamic is shaking up Nigeria's democracy, impacting accountability, transparency, and who's included in politics. In Nigerian politics, the concept of Godfatherism involves influential

individuals, known as godfathers wielding significant power over political appointments and election outcomes. The political Godfathers in Nigeria build an array of loyalists around them and use their influence which is often tied to monetary considerations to manipulate the rest of the society.

Kennedy (2020) suggests these Godfathers use their wealth and influence to decide who gets nominated and wins elections across all levels of government. The relationship between Godfathers and their Godsons is transactional as the Godfather ensures victories for the Godson, who then uses their political authority to advance the interests of the Godfather in social, economic, and political realms. According to Albert (2005).

The politicians do not go against their godfathers because of the benefits; they are guaranteed if they remain loyal. An important example would be the case of Anambra and Lagos state. In Contrary, the present case of

## **JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)**

River State suggests beach of agreement between godfather and godson. (Wike and Fubara). Historically, godfatherism has been a tool for consolidating power. During Nigeria's pre- and post-independence periods, regional leaders like Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, and Nnamdi Azikiwe wielded immense political influence, shaping the political and administrative landscapes of their regions (Falola & Heaton, 2008). However, the practice evolved from ideological mentorship to a more transactional and exploitative relationship. While this is not exclusive to Nigeria, this practice is notably prominent in its electoral politics and governance due to various factors such as economic circumstances and party structures.

Oghuvbu (2023) says that the pliable criminal and social justice system is one of the factors for godfatherism to thrive in Nigeria. Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) also have the

opinion that other factors are a profit-seeking patron, an easily influenced political system that caters only to a selected few in the society, a poor electoral system, relentless office seekers, and the least trustworthy media always ready to do the bidding of the interests of the highest bidder in society. Godfathers heavily invest in their chosen candidates by providing financial support for nomination processes and campaigning efforts.

This investment extends beyond money to include garnering support through methods like violence, election manipulation, and rigging tactics. Consequently, elected officials in Nigeria often prioritize loyalty to their Godfathers over allegiance to the public, thereby undermining values and public accountability standards. Tensions can arise within the Godfather and Godson relationship if the latter attempts independence from the former which can lead to turmoil and unrest

in society. It is also important to note that not all political donors are Godfathers, but all Godfathers are political donors. The culture of Godfatherism presents an obstacle to democracy in Nigeria as it centralizes authority among a select few, overthrows the electoral system, and obstructs the establishment of a truly inclusive and transparent political framework.

In Contemporary Nigerian politics, godfathers often dictate the selection of candidates, the allocation of resources, and the implementation of policies, prioritizing their interests over those of the electorate (Agbaje, 2008). By the time of the 2023 general elections, godfatherism had become institutionalized within political party structures. Political parties relied heavily on godfathers for campaign financing, which further entrenched their influence. This section explores the role of godfatherism in political party financing, its historical

development, and its implications for electoral integrity and governance in Nigeria. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria highlighted the pervasive influence of godfatherism in political party financing.

Several prominent godfathers played critical roles in shaping the outcomes of the elections, providing financial and logistical support to their preferred candidates. One of the most notable examples of godfatherism in the 2023 elections was the role of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a former governor of Lagos State and a key figure in the All-Progressives Congress (APC). Tinubu, often referred to as the “Jagaban,” has a long history of political mentorship and party financing. His financial and organizational support was instrumental in securing the APC’s victory in the presidential election (Adebayo, 2023). Tinubu’s influence extended beyond Lagos, as he provided resources and strategic guidance to candidates in other states.

## **JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)**

Similarly, other political parties relied on their own networks of godfathers to mobilize resources and secure support.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), for instance, benefited from the financial backing of figures like Atiku Abubakar and Nyesom Wike, who played pivotal roles in the party's campaigns. However, internal conflicts over resource allocation and candidate selection undermined the cohesion of the PDP, highlighting the challenges associated with godfatherism. At the state level, godfathers wielded significant influence over gubernatorial and legislative elections. In states such as Rivers, Kano, and Anambra, godfathers determined the selection of candidates and provided substantial funding for their campaigns. For example, in Rivers State, the political rivalry between Nyesom Wike and other party leaders underscored the centrality of godfatherism in shaping electoral outcomes (Adebayo, 2023).

These dynamics limited opportunities for grassroots participation and independent candidates, perpetuating a system of elitism and exclusion. Significantly, the influence of godfathers distorts the democratic process by prioritizing the interests of a few powerful individuals over those of the electorate. This practice undermines public trust in the electoral system and contributes to voter apathy, as citizens perceive elections as predetermined by godfathers rather than reflective of their choices.

Political parties in Nigeria face significant resource constraints, making them heavily dependent on godfathers for financial and logistical support. This dependency gives godfathers considerable leverage over party structures and decision-making processes. For example, during the 2023 general elections, several political parties relied on the financial backing of prominent godfathers to fund their campaigns, highlighting the applicability of

resource mobilization theory to this phenomenon (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2019). Godfathers played a significant role in states with a history of political patronage, influencing the 2023 election outcomes. According to Onwuegbu (2025), some key states where godfathers had notable influence include:

### Table 1

The 2023 general election was a success, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The electoral votes breakdown is as follows: Eighteen candidates were running for the Nigeria president but only three were seen as having a realistic chance. They were Tinubu from the governing All Progressives Congress party (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Peter Obi of the smaller Labour Party (LP). Moreover, according to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) tallies from all 36 states and the federal capital Abuja, Tinubu garnered about 36.6% or 8.79 million of valid votes counted from the weekend election, while Atiku trailed behind

with 29.1% or 6.98 million of valid votes. Obi received 25.4%, or about 6.1 million votes. Significantly, to win the presidential election in Nigeria, a candidate needed a simple majority, and have at least a quarter of the votes cast in at least two-thirds of the 36 states and Abuja, which Tinubu did.

### Effect of godfatherism and godson relation on electoral outcome

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 (Igbini, & Okolie 2020:93). 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 (2014:139) 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 (2016:3) averred “In Nigeria, democracy is not yet completely developed, and the phenomenon of godfatherism has jeopardized the political process as well as citizens' livelihood.” In Nigeria, the reason for the politics of godfatherism is not far-fetched. According to Rasak, Oye & Ake (2017: 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 (2019:14) 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. 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 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 (Osayi,2015:6). Olawale (2005: 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. 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

## **JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)**

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 (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2016:6). 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 (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2016:6). 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 (Igbini & Okolie, 2020:100).

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 main motivation behind the godfathers 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 ((Igbini & Okolie, 2020:100).

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.

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 is 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 (Ugwu, Izueke & Obasi, 2013).

### CONCLUSION

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 of 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 forthcoming election:

1. Stakeholders in the Nigerian election system, such as the government, electoral body, civil Society, the judiciary, and religious institutions should be adamant about bolstering the democratic structure.
2. 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.

## JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

3. The existing electoral process must be re-examined to deemphasize money in Nigeria's political environment. To that end, monetary contributions to political parties by individuals or organizations 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.

### References:

Adebayo, A. (2023). The role of political godfathers in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. *Journal of African Politics*, 19(2), 56–72

Ahmed, F & Ali, M.A. (2019) "Politics of Godfatherism and its Implication on Socio-economic and political Development of Nigeria", *African Journal of Management*, 3(4), 114-135.

Abdullahi, Idowu (2022). Losing the 2023 presidential election may end PDP says Atiku. *Punchnews*, punchng.com. March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Adepegba, A. and Adebayo F. (2023). #Emilokan: The Kingmaker who became king. *Punchnews*, punchng.com. march.

Akinboyo, Temidayo (2023). Analysis: Factors that contributed to Atiku's lost in the 2023 presidential election. *Premium Times*, www.premiumtimesng.com. April 1.

Albert, I.S. (2005) "Explaining "Godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics", *African Sociological Review*, 9(2):79-105.

Chukwuemeka, E. (2012). *Administration and Politics in Nigeria Past, Present and Issues*, Lagos Vinez Publishers.

Edigin, L.U (2010) "The Political Conflicts and Godfatherism in Nigeria: A Focus on the Fourth Republic", *African Research Review: An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal*, Ethiopia 4 (4): 17, October.

Jibril, Z.A and Kabiru, D. (2017) "Theoretical and Conceptual Issues on Democracy and Democratization in Nigeria", *TESAM Akademi Dergisi - Turkish Journal of TESAM*

Oviasuyi, P. O. (2009). "Impact of Godfatherism on Nigerian Politics and Administration: Anambra and Oyo States Experiences." *Educational Research Quarterly*, 33(2), 73–87.

## JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

- Rasak, B., Oye, A. J., Ake, M., & Raji, A. A. (2017). God fatherism and political patronage in Nigeria: A theoretical overview. *Political Science Review*, 8(1), 77-101.
- Uhere, C. I. (2024). 2023 Elections in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward. *Eket-International Journal of Advanced Research*, 1(1), 53-69.
- Seriki, A. I, Jimoh, E.A, & Daniel, O.Y (2023). An Assessment of the 2023 presidential.
- Nigeria's 2023 Election. Comparative Electoral Systems Journal*, 10(3),12-27
- Okonkwo, E. (2023). Third-Force Politics and the Future of Nigeria's party System
- Ojo, J. (2023). Democratic Governance and Electoral Reforms in Nigeria: Lessons from the 2023.
- Kennedy, Chukwueme K. 2020. "Politics of Godfatherism and Sustainable Development A Study of Delta State Politics." 18 (4).
- Albert, Isaac Olawale. 2005. "Explaining 'godfatherism' in Nigerian politics." *African Sociological Review/ Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 9 (2): 79–105.
- Malumfashi, S. L. (2018). *Elections Management in a Volatile Environment*. Kaduna: Hanjak Academic Publishers.
- Nwagwu, Ejikeme Jombo. 2010. "Democracy, God Fatherism and the Problem of Accountability and Responsible Leadership in Nigeria." *international Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences* 2:103–112.
- Oghuvbu, Ejiroghene Augustine. 2023. "Godfatherism and its Effects on Nigeria's Democracy." *RUDN Journal of Public Administration* 10 (3): 465–479.
- Olarinmoye, Omobolaji Ololade. 2008. "Godfathers, Political Parties and electoral corruption in Nigeria." *African Journal of political science and international relations* 2 (4): 66
- Agbaje, A. (2008). Political parties and pressure groups. In Oyediran, O. (Ed.), *Governance and development in Nigeria*. Agbo Areo Publishers.
- Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fisher, J. (2007). Party finance: The regulatory framework in established democracies. *Political Quarterly*, 78(4), 515–525.
- INEC. (2021). *Election expenditure and financial transparency in Nigeria*. Independent National Electoral Commission.
- McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). *Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial*

## JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(6), 1212–1241.

Ojo, J. S. (2018). Campaign finance and godfatherism in Nigerian elections. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 12(1), 12–22.

Ojukwu, C. O., & Olaifa, T. (2019). Godfatherism and political crises in Nigeria. *International Journal of African Studies*, 15(2), 23–34.

State	Godfather	Beneficiary Candidate	Outcome
Lagos	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	Babajide Sanwo-Olu	Won 2023 governorship
Rivers	Nyesom Wike	Siminalayi Fubara	Won 2023 governorship
Kano	Rabiu Kwankwaso	Abba Kabir Yusuf	Won 2023 governorship

Table 1