



IN THE NAME OF MY FATHER: THE PERSONALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIAN POLITICS, 1999-2023.

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ABSTRACT: *The study examines the implications of the roles of class, godfatherism, and personalization of government for Nigeria's political development and nation-building. The research method employed was the qualitative analytical method which involved content analysis of relevant documentary data on the subject. The approach adopted was also thematic. The research findings indicate that because of the "unending" transition to civil rule, most politicians avoided the transition because they are not certain if the military will hand over power to civilian, and they lacked the money to compete with the political entrepreneurs. These gave room for political entrepreneurs or 'money bags' to dominate the transition programme. The principle of party supremacy shortly lost its meaning as campaign organizations took over from party secretariats. And the party's manifesto or programme lost its meaning to the personal 'greed' or ambitions of the political entrepreneurs, who also positioned their children to power through various means, including inheritance of political legacies, strategic alliances, and leveraging financial resources. The attitude of these godfathers impacted negatively on good governance. It also reduces the legitimacy of government and voids the electoral value of the citizens.*

KEYWORDS: Politicians, Political Entrepreneurs, God fathers, Politics, Nigeria, Government.



INTRODUCTION

The personalization of government in Nigerian politics did not start today. It could be traced to Nigeria's Second Republic (1979 -1983), when some political entrepreneurs use money to influence decision making in political parties and the political process in general. The use of both public and private money in the funding of political parties began in the second Republic. Though, the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly stated, "No association other than a political party (was allowed to) canvas for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election." However, Section 205 of the 1979 Constitution allows corporate bodies and individuals to give financial support to political parties. Though, it bans political parties from receiving external funds. Thus, the 1979 Constitution, though provided some form of check, allowed political entrepreneurs to use money to influence the political process.

While the Mohammed Buhari led-military coup of 1984 stalled the development of political parties in Nigeria, the transition programme of General Ibrahim Babangida further damaged the party system. The government registered two political parties - Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC), and to ensure that political entrepreneur's do not hijacked the control of political parties, the government funded the political parties. This, however, did not deter individual candidates from opening their campaign offices, and sourcing for funds independent of the parties. Some candidates, also, organized their special fund raising activities, and some were almost operating parallel organizations with their parties. According to Ezekiel M. Adeyi:

This introduced a new trend in party funding in Nigeria. Candidates' financial support to the party dwindled. The consequence was that .the parties were reduced to clearing houses where candidates came only to obtain tickets for elections. This trend made it more difficult to track campaign financing and party funding as there were no records on income and expenditure of the political parties and those of the candidates.

The administration of General Sani Abacha further consolidated the trend that began with the Babangida's new breed politicians, where candidates just use the parties to secure nominations, and then source for funds independent of the parties. Following the death of Abacha, and the birth of Abubakar transition to democratic rule, the political entrepreneurs who played prominent role during the infamous Abacha regime, joined the founders of the parties. They not only made their money available to the parties, they also contested and won elections using their financial muscles. Once elected, they reward themselves with the best of their cupidity, personalizing the government, and ensuring their children succeed them.



This study is anchored on the Neopatrimonialism Theory. This theory focuses on how political systems in developing countries, particularly in Africa, exhibit characteristics of patrimonialism, where leaders maintain power through personal networks, clientelism, and patronage rather than through institutionalized and accountable governance structures. Neopatrimonialism Theory can help analyze how Nigerian politics during the specified period has been characterized by personalized forms of governance, where political leaders exert extensive control over state resources, institutions, and decision-making processes. It delves into the dynamics of political patronage, rent-seeking behavior, corruption, and the centralization of power in the hands of a few individuals or political elites. By using Neopatrimonialism Theory, the study explores how personalization of government in Nigerian politics has influenced governance outcomes, public service delivery, accountability mechanisms, and the overall functioning of democratic institutions. This framework provides insights into the challenges and implications of personalized governance practices on political stability, development, and democratic governance in Nigeria.

Definition of terms

It is necessary to begin this paper by defining key terms used in it. In this essay, the term ‘political entrepreneur’ is viewed as “a businessman investing in public office. He buys the people and sells the people for private profit. Those whose votes he bought have no control over him. He is not answerable to them. And with the power he has bought, he can punish them if he chooses.” The other term requiring definition is “politician”. Here, a politician is seen as a political agent who acts on behalf of his nominators, works for his constituency’s interest, even at personal risk and sacrifice.

Background to the return to democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999

Nigeria has suffered from political instability since attaining political independence in 1960. Major reasons for these included the resentment and rivalry amongst the regional power groups, maladministration of the political class and the ambitious military officers eager to seize power on flimsy excuses. A combination of these reasons led to the first military intervention in Nigerian politics in January 1966, the counter-coup of July 1966 and the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970. Nigeria returned to civilian rule briefly between 1979 and 1983 but General Mohammed Buhari, later ousted the civilian government of Shehu Shagari in 1984. However, General Babangida displaced Buhari in a palace coup in August 1985.

Between 1986 and 1989, there were indications that the Babangida’s led military regime was prepared to embark on a programme of transition to civil rule. However, as would become very clear, this programme was so characterized by apparent manipulations that the president was widely believed to have a “concealed plan”, which was to continue in power. The transition programme, as widely expected, ended in mess with the annulment of June 12



Presidential election and subsequent installation of Ernest Shonekan as head of the Interim Government. Shonekan was ousted by General Abacha. During the Abacha's regime, pro-democrats, journalists, and human rights activists were harassed and detained. For instance, M. K. O. Abiola was arrested along with dozens of government critics. In November 1995, the government executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight compatriots from the Ogoni community, who had agitated for environmental standards and economic rights in the country's oil-producing areas.

The Abacha government sought to polish its image by announcing political and economic reforms. Despite the promise of a new democratic transition agenda, the government permitted only five carefully screened parties to participate in elections and conducted the program in a repressive political atmosphere. In April 1998, all five parties nominated Gen. Abacha as their sole candidate for the presidency, leading many to denounce the transition as a manipulated exercise to preserve the military's power.

However, following the sudden death of Abacha on June 8, 1998, the cabal of military leaders and businessmen who ran the country concluded that civilian government should be restored, though the privileges of the military must be remained intact. Abdulsalami Abubakar, who replaced him, quickly took steps to reverse some of the most unpopular features of Gen. Abacha's rule. Several prominent political prisoners were released, the regime began a dialogue with the domestic opposition, and the country's diplomatic isolation eased. Within two weeks, Gen. Abubakar announced a new program for transition to democratic rule, set to conclude in May 1999. It was a hurried transition, pushed through by a terrorizing military desperate to salvage whatever respect was left for the military by exiting gracefully and swiftly from office. The initial transition toward civilian rule, completed with Olusegun Obasanjo's swearing in as president on May 29, took less than a year from when the transition began.

Between politicians and political entrepreneurs

The 1999 Nigeria's transition occurred without a constitutional framework or a genuine public debate on the nation's constitutional future. Throughout the election period, the military government relied on decrees and ad-hoc regulations to guide the transition process. For instance, in August 1998, Gen. Abubakar issued Decree No. 17, which established the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) to manage and oversee voter registration and four rounds of elections. Voter's registration exercise was also hurried. It took only two weeks, between October 5 and 19, 1998, to begin and conclude the exercise. This is in spite of many logistical problems like shortages of materials, delays in the opening of registration centers, poorly trained officials, and attempts by political party agents to manipulate the process.



To help prevent the formation of regional or ethnic-based political parties, an issue that has plagued Nigeria for decades, INEC established strict registration conditions. To compete in local elections, political parties were required to set up and maintain offices in 24 of the 36 states in Nigeria and demonstrate an ethnic and regional mix in each party's leadership. To continue the transition process, parties initially were required to obtain at least 10 percent of the vote in 24 states during local government elections. This figure later changed to 5 percent, with a caveat that at least three parties would advance to the later three rounds of elections. The INEC regulations, while well intended, set the stage for intense competition between parties to attract and retain prominent politicians, potential candidates, and financial backers, especially in parts of the country where support for the parties was weak.

With no regulations for campaign finance, parties competed vigorously for wealthy, well connected, and potentially dubious individuals to fund campaigns out of their own pockets. Thus, the political entrepreneurs, who played prominent role during the infamous Abacha regime, joined the founders of the parties. They not only made their money available to the parties, they also sponsored their surrogates, and some contested and won elections using their financial muscles. For instances, it was alleged that Emeka Offor singled handed sponsored the election of Chinwoke Mbadinuju of Anambra State and Orji Uzor Kalu, who allegedly gave 100 million naira for the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo, sponsored his own election for the governorship of Abia State.

Most politicians also avoided the transition because they are not certain if the military will hand over power to civilian, and they lacked the money to compete with the political entrepreneurs. These gave room for political entrepreneurs or 'money bags' to dominate the transition programme. The principle of party supremacy shortly lost its meaning as campaign organizations took over from party secretariats. And the party's manifesto or programme lost its meaning to the personal 'greed' or ambitions of the political entrepreneurs, also known as godfather.

From godfatherism to the personalization of government

The politics of godfatherism is not a new phenomenon in the politics of Nigeria. There are instances of godfatherism in the first and second republics, but it was between politicians or political agents; individuals working for the electorates. For instance, Nigeria founding fathers like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello and Awolowo nurtured political godsons. Awolowo's political godsons include Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Lateef Jakande and Chief Bisi Onabanjo (all former state governors, 1979-1983), Nnamdi Azikiwe's political godsons in the Eastern Igbo region of Nigeria are Jim Nwobodo and Chief Sam Mbakwe (both former governors of states), etc while Ahmadu Bello's godson included politicians commonly referred as Kaduna mafia. Though there were few cases of political entrepreneur sponsored



candidate. For instance, between 1979 and 1983, Dr. Olusola Saraki was a godfather of Kwara state. He sponsored Alhaji Adamu Attah, the then Governor of Kwara State. The relationship turned sour and he withdrew the support. Olusola Saraki then shifted his support to Chief Cornelius Adebayo who was in the Unity Party of Nigeria although he was in the National Party of Nigeria. Chief Cornelius Adebayo went ahead to win the gubernatorial election in Kwara in 1983. Some of these godsons of the first generation patrons later became godfathers in subsequent Nigerian politics. For instance, in Enugu State, Jim Nwobodo was purportedly believed to have sponsored Chimaroke Nnamani in 1999.

However, the politics of godfatherism became notorious and widespread in the Nigerian polity since the return to democratic rule in 1999. This is mainly because the political entrepreneurs hijacked it. More so, the Olusegun Obasanjo's regime, which benefited from the funding of political entrepreneurs promoted and allowed godfatherism to flourish. Thus, the worst manifestations of godfatherism in Nigerian history emerged under president Obasanjo's democratic rule. Some of the 'godfathers' of the Fourth Republic includes Olusola Saraki of Kwara state, Bola Tinubu of Lagos State, Emeka Offor and Ifeanyi Uba of Anambra state, Lamidi Adedibu of Oyo state, and Ali Modu Sheriff of Borno state, *et cetera*. The attitude of some of these godfathers impacted negatively on good governance. It also reduces the legitimacy of government and voids the electoral value of the citizens.

In the name of my father

Nigerian political rulers and leaders have historically positioned their children to power through various means, including inheritance of political legacies, strategic alliances, and leveraging financial resources. This phenomenon, often referred to as political dynasties, has been a notable feature of Nigerian politics and has implications for governance, democracy, and social mobility. According to Ihechukwu Madubuike "appointment into top political positions, when they are not made on ethnic basis, follow the "old boy network" formula or the god father principle. This is how some group of people or a class comes to perpetuate its domination over others. This same phenomenon influences recruitment and participation into Nigeria's political economy."

One common way Nigerian political rulers position their children to power is by grooming them to inherit their political legacies. This involves actively involving their children in political activities, nurturing their careers within political parties or government institutions, and paving the way for their succession. For example, Olusola Saraki, a successful politician and godfather, and was once a leader of the Nigerian Senate, prepare his children Bukola and Gbemisola for political role. Bukola went on to become a two time governor of Kwara State and a Senate president, while Gbemisola served as a federal minister after serving as member of the federal house of representative. Retired military general and former president of the



Nigerian senate, David Mark ensured that his daughter Blessing Onoh was elected senator representing Otukpo/Ohimini Federal constituency of Benue State. Segun Osoba, a former governor of Ogun State has his son, Olumide Osoba as a member of the federal house of representative. The former governor of Abia State, and later a Senator, T. A. Orji, also pave way for his son Chinedu Orji, who became a lawmaker and later Speaker of the Abia State House of Assembly. Lateef Jankande, the first civilian governor of Lagos state also has his children, Deji and Seyi Jakande as member of the House of Representatives and vice-chairman of Odi-Olowo/Ojuwoye local government development area of Lagos state, *et cetera*.

Another method is through strategic alliances and networks. Political leaders often forge alliances with other influential families or political blocs, ensuring that their children benefit from these connections. This can include arranging marriages with influential families or forming alliances based on shared interests and goals. These alliances create a network of support and influence that can be instrumental in positioning their children for political power. For example, former President Muhammed Buhari's son, Yusuf Muhammed Buhari married Zahra Nasir Bayero, the daughter of Emir of Bichi; Abolaji Ajimobi, son of the Governor of Oyo State married Fatima Gunduje, daughter of the Governor of Kano State; and Nneoma Orji, the daughter of former Abia State Governor, T. A. Orji was married to Obinna Ararume, the son of Senator Senator Ifeanyi Ararume, *et cetera*.

Financial resources play a crucial role in positioning children of political leaders to power. Wealthy political families can use their financial resources to fund election campaigns, establish businesses that generate revenue and influence, and provide opportunities for their children to build networks and gain political experience. This financial leverage often translates into political influence and power.

Political leaders also invest in the education and training of their children to prepare them for political careers. They may send them to prestigious universities both within Nigeria and abroad, provide access to specialized training in areas like law, economics, or public administration, and facilitate internships or mentorship programs with experienced politicians. This educational advantage equips their children with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the complexities of Nigerian politics.

Overall, the positioning of children to power by Nigerian political rulers underscores the complex dynamics of political succession, influence, and the interplay between family legacies and political governance. It raises questions about meritocracy, democratic principles, and the extent to which political power remains concentrated within certain elite circles.



Implications of the roles of class, godfatherism, and personalization of government for Nigeria's political development and nation-building.

Class, godfatherism, and the personalization of government in Nigeria have significant implications for political development and nation-building. Class dynamics play a crucial role in Nigeria's political landscape. The country has a diverse socio-economic structure with significant disparities between the wealthy elite and the majority of the population. This class divide affects access to political power, resources, and opportunities. The concentration of wealth and influence among a small class of elites can lead to inequalities in governance, favoritism, and exclusionary policies that hinder inclusive political development and nation-building efforts.

Godfatherism, characterized by influential political figures who exert control over political processes and decision-making, has profound implications for Nigeria's political development. This phenomenon often leads to patronage, nepotism, and the dominance of personal interests over public good. Godfatherism can undermine meritocracy, weaken institutions, and perpetuate a culture of political dependency. It hampers fair competition, stifles political innovation, and fosters a climate of impunity where accountability is often compromised.

The personalization of government, where leaders concentrate power and decision-making authority in their hands, poses challenges to Nigeria's political development and nation-building. When governance becomes overly personalized, it can lead to authoritarian tendencies, erosion of institutional checks and balances, and diminished civic engagement. Leaders may prioritize their personal agendas over the collective interests of the nation, leading to governance failures, policy inconsistencies, and weakened democratic institutions.

The dynamics of political benefactors and godfatherism have had a profound impact on Nigerian politics, shaping electoral outcomes, governance, and political alliances. Instances include the case of Olusola Saraki, whose strategic support for candidates in Kwara State showcased the influential role of political benefactors. Saraki's ability to shift support between candidates across different political parties underscored his pivotal role in determining electoral outcomes, highlighting the significance of personal connections and financial backing in Nigerian politics. Another compelling case is the Anambra scenario, where Chris Uba's influence led to the installation and subsequent removal of Governor Chris Ngige. The intricate agreements and power dynamics between benefactor and beneficiary, as evidenced by signed covenants and alleged resignations, illustrate the extent to which godfatherism can influence governance and political decisions. The Oyo State example further elucidates the complexities of godfatherism, as seen through Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu's formidable political clout and his fallout with Governor Rasheed Ladoja. The deployment of legislative maneuvers and allegations of political machinery withdrawal highlight the



interplay between power, patronage, and loyalty within political circles. Additionally, the Borno State case involving Alimodu Sheriff's financing of gubernatorial elections and subsequent decision to contest and win the governorship exemplifies the evolving dynamics of political benefactors transitioning to political office themselves.

These case studies collectively underscore the intricate web of relationships, power dynamics, and strategic maneuvers that define Nigerian politics. They highlight the enduring influence of political benefactors and godfatherism on electoral processes, governance structures, and the overall political landscape.

CONCLUSION

The work has examined the implications of the roles of class, godfatherism, and personalization of government for Nigeria's political development and nation-building. It found out that because of the "unending" transition to civil rule, most politicians avoided the transition because they are not certain if the military will hand over power to civilian, and they lacked the money to compete with the political entrepreneurs. These gave room for political entrepreneurs or 'money bags' to dominate the transition programme. The principle of party supremacy shortly lost its meaning as campaign organizations took over from party secretariats. And the party's manifesto or programme lost its meaning to the personal 'greed' or ambitions of the political entrepreneurs, who also positioned their children to power through various means, including inheritance of political legacies, strategic alliances, and leveraging financial resources. The attitude of these godfathers impacted negatively on good governance. It also reduces the legitimacy of government and voids the electoral value of the citizens. To address these challenges, the study recommends comprehensive reforms across multiple fronts. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, enhancing civic education and participation, and fostering a culture of meritocracy are essential steps. Additionally, initiatives to reduce socio-economic inequalities, promote inclusive governance, and empower marginalized communities can contribute to a more equitable and cohesive society. Ultimately, overcoming the implications of class dynamics, godfatherism, and government personalization is crucial for Nigeria's political development and the building of a resilient nation that promotes the welfare and aspirations of all its citizens.