

POLITICAL GODFATHERISM, VIOLENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to examine the phenomenon of "Political GodFatherism" and its role in the politics of Nigeria. Though, the concept is as old as politics itself, its recent rise in Nigerian politics gives reasons for the evaluation of the concept and the impact it makes in the politics of the country. The findings of this study indicated that, the character of the State and the nature of politics in Nigeria has impacted on society, negative values that now threaten the fabric of the country's nascent democracy. Competition amongst godfather to control state powers through their favoured godsons has denied the electorates the right to elect their preferred candidates, thereby rendering elections ineffective. Besides, the fierce struggle for state power has also resulted in some of the worst electoral violence in the country, before, during and after elections. It was the candid view of this study that political godfatherism as practised in Nigeria is a potential threat to the sustenance of democracy. The study suggested attitudinal change and positive perception of politics by these groups of people.

Keywords: *Politics, Godfatherism, Democracy, Marxism, state power and Political class.*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of godfatherism has become a plague in the body politics of Nigeria. There is an emerging trend in Nigeria which indicates that an intending contestant must have and depend on a godfather with the requisite wealth and power to get him into elective office. The implication is that contestants no longer rely on their popularity among the electorates but on their chosen godfathers to help them secure electoral victories. This whole process undermines the usual popular sovereignty and other attributes that make democracies often unique and preferable to other governmental systems. The dominant role of the political godfathers in Nigerian politics and the competition amongst godfathers to win elections for their godsons with the ultimate intension of controlling state apparatus necessarily encourage the adoption of varying methods to achieve electoral victory.

Elections in Nigeria are therefore, mere formality for the confirmation of a candidate already selected by a godfather. Thus, the Nigerian electorates are deprived of their right to elect their preferred leaders. The consequence of this is the emergence in the political scene of mediocres and stooges as leaders and managers of state resources. This perhaps explains the erratic economic growth rate the country has been experienced in the last decade or so.

A unique aspect of every sovereign state in the world is the nature of politics and the character of the state. Politics according to Laswell (1936) is "who gets what, when and how". At the level of society, politics is the various activities that involve the relationship between and amongst individuals and coalitions of actors, the means by which access to scarce, social and economic values are mediated and determined (Olaoye; 2006). However, the institution of government acts on behalf of the state, and through its structures, institutions and agencies, government enacts and express the sovereign will of the state. Apparently, it is the desire of most citizens to get control of the machinery of government for the ultimate purpose of the distribution and redistribution of the scarce resources.

Undoubtedly, in Africa and among other developing countries, the state becomes the central focus of politics. Expressing this view, Clapham (1985) asserts that, "the state has emerged as the key structure of third world politics". Olufemi (2003) also affirmed that despite the divergent conceptions of politics, there is a common ground in the centrality of the state to the political process. The concentration of power and wealth in the state in Africa explains the scramble for the control of its structures and institutions by the political class in society. This struggle and the consequent values have impacted on society negatively. In our nascent democratic experience, the power tussles among the members of the political class have resulted in violence in varying forms and intensities. However, this study will focus on only those violence cases related to elections in Nigeria.

Therefore, the main thrust of the study is to examine the phenomenon of "godfatherism" and its role in Nigerian body politics. The study advances the argument that competition between members of the political class accounts for most of the election related violence in Nigeria. And that the competition for power becomes intensified as politics is viewed as a "do-or-die" affair by the political class. Also, the domineering role of godfathers in the politics of the country contributes to the weakness and vulnerability of the political structures and institutions in Nigeria. These weak and susceptible political structures and institutions lack the will power to enhance and encourage democracy in Nigeria. These weakness and vulnerability is responsible for the now fragile and weak democracy we practise in the country.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPT

The growing concern about the issue of "godfatherism in Nigeria has necessitated tremendous scholarly literature of the concept. Literature of the concept portrays varying opinions and views. However, from a general socio-political perspective, Williams (2004) attempts an incisive definition of the term. According to him; ...godfatherism can be generally seen as a practice which entails the sustenance of a kind of social and political relationships in which the subordinate looks onto the superior for the propagation and fulfillment of certain roles, desires and interactions which binds both together or in which both have equal stake but with the superior determining what the subordinate gets in the process.

This view presents godfatherism as a relationship between a superior and a subordinate in which the superior has some level of influence over the subordinate as a result of his superior status. In other words, godfatherism connotes a mutual relationship between individuals in which one is superior and the other a subordinate who relies on his superior partner for favours to help him attain his life goals. In the realm of politics, godfatherism portrays a power-based relationship. For instance, Ukhun (2004) emphasizes that the implicit feature in godfatherism is power. He stated that, "...power is the determinant or fundamental feature of godfatherism and the power could be economic, political, spiritual, voodoo etc" (Ukhun, 2004).

Godfatherism based on power relationship is often skewed in favour of the godfather who can afford to lord it over the godson, if, he so wishes owing to his superordinate influence and affluence. In party politics, godfathers determine who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins in a state. It should be noted that, the power and influence of godfathers go beyond the nomination of candidates for elections and determining who wins. Observations have clearly shown that the role of the godfather tends to become more apparent and even more effective after the elections. As Chukwuma (2008) remarks, the godfather settles to dictate 'who gets what, when and how' in the distribution of scarce resources after the elections have been contested and won. Therefore, the role of godfathers goes beyond the elections; and gets rather stronger and more evident thereafter. A political godfather is seen as one having the abilities and capabilities to manipulate the electoral process to the favour of his chosen godson.

Political godfatherism also connotes sponsorship of, contestants in an election by a wealthy and influential individual or group who in return expects protection and other forms of rewards and privileges. Kolawole (2004) therefore, sees godfatherism as "an institution of political kingmaking through which certain political office holders of tenuous political clout come into power". Hence, it is a relationship based on political surrogacy involving financial and moral assistance where the godfather is the major donor and the godson the primary receiver. However, as the relationship progresses, the godfather stands to reap his investment. It can therefore be described as a relationship based on "give and take." Be that as it may, it is important to note that this relationship is not fixed or determinate. As a matter of fact, it breaks over time as a result of the contradictions inherent in godfatherism. For instance, in politics the rise of the godson to political role tends to threaten in most situations the prominence of the godfather. And the godfather may see this as a threat to his preponderance position in the relationship.

A dimension of scholarly work on godfatherism links the concept to the elitist and clientelist theories in political science. For example, the work of Adeyemi Suenu introduces an elitist correlation to the understanding of godfatherism. He sees godfatherism as being synonymous with the elites. According to him; ...elites in the political spheres are known in Nigeria's context as godfathers. They are usually the ones who govern. They are known as the kingmakers and, often, they are seen as

strongmen who control politics in their different regions (Suenu, 2004). This approach to the explanation of godfatherism in politics introduces complexities. While we may accept that godfatherism is a sub-elite phenomenon, it cannot be entirely accepted as the same or synonymous with being elitism. Chukwuma (2008) highlights the underpinning reasons why godfatherism differs from elitism. According to him:

For one thing, the instrumental solidarity which characterizes elitism is essentially lacking in godfatherism as obtained in Nigeria today. For another thing, godfatherism is a rather personalized relationship unlike elitism, which has some manifest "group" characterization (Chukwuma, 2008).

In the same vein, godfatherism is only similar to clientelism, yet they are not the same. For example, godfathers operate from behind the scene. It is a system of disguised individual colonization whereby the godfather either by force or conquest colonizes his political godson. In other words, godfathers rule by proxies. This is unlike what obtains in clientelistic politics where the patron usually operates from a position of public authority and prominence.

THE RISE OF POLITICAL GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA

Godfatherism as a phenomenon in society dates back to time immemorial. In the United States of America, godfatherism was closely linked to heads of criminal gangs who sponsored politicians and influence the electoral process to ensure that their sponsored candidates won the election and in return expected protection and contracts. A process generally referred to in America as "Party machines (Ibrahim, 2006). The novel "The Godfather" written by Mario Puzo portraying the attempt by a Sicilian family (a mafia dynasty) to maintain total control of the drug business in the United States of America contributed to the popularity of the term. However, the concept of "godfatherism" has its origin in Christianity. In the view of Coker (2004), godfatherism is an instrument of Christian mentorship. In the Christian religion there are godparents and godchildren (Anakwenzu, 2004).

Godparents are usually chosen, adopted and to raise Christian children to become God-fearing, law abiding and responsible individuals in society. These godfathers in the Christian religion are nothing but role models whose lifestyles are worthy of emulation. Such individuals may not be necessarily wealthy, but are best endowed with Christian virtues. The godfather was to help guide the moral attitudes and the educational development of the godson. Therefore, the relationship between the two was a sacred religious duty of a faithful servant of God that was intended to guide and nurture a less privileged individual to succeed and become a morally responsible individual. The godfather usually shows love and kindness towards his godson and sometimes practically expresses his love with expensive gifts, moral suasion and so on. There is no doubt that even at present, some individuals care and raise godsons who are responsible citizens of this country.

However, in the realm of politics, the rise of political godfatherism dates back to the decolonization era starting with the emergence of our liberation fighters

and the nationalist leaders. In the decolonization and immediate post-independence period, the likes of Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Aminu Kano, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo and others emerged in Nigeria's political landscape. As leaders, they had influence and power and thus created political patronage especially in their various regions. Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, for instance, may be regarded as the political godfather of the North. Undoubtedly, a number of Northerners benefited from him as his followers (e.g., Sir Abubakar, Tafawa Balewa, who became the first Prime Minister in Nigeria (1960-1966). Similarly, Chief Awolowo's ideas and his political doctrines (Awoism) have continued to influence and guide the Yorubas of South-West Nigeria in their interactions and relationship with the other ethnic groups within the Nigerian body politics.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the interest of the present crop of political godfathers in Nigeria differs substantively from the godfathers of old in the Christian religion. In the words of Ogbonwan, "the true meaning of the word godfather has been twisted" (Ogbonwan, 2005). He stated further that "...godfatherism today refers to a relationship with subordinates, which no longer signify the caring, loving and kindness characteristic of the old. Rather, the term has been bastardized and now connotes, the boss of an organized political crime outfit against the Nigerian people. Corroborating Ogbonwan's assertion, Anakwenze (2004) describes the situation thus "the present characteristic posture of godfatherism in Nigeria today differs substantively from the godfathers of the Christian faith".

The main difference between the godfather of today and the godfather of the Christian faith is that the later provide counseling and guidance to his godson to become a morally responsible individual in society, whereas the former sees himself as the beneficiary and gives favour only when he feels that it advances his own interest. This implicit personalized virtue now dominates the relationship between a godfather and godson in Nigeria. This informed Nnamani, the former Governor of Enugu State to define godfather as "simply a self-seeking individual whose goal is to use the government for his own purposes, '(Nnamani, 2003). Anakwenze (2004) also opines that:

The present day godfathers lack the basic understanding of the fundamental concept of government. However, they believe that government is there to be hijacked to serve personal political interest and to enrich themselves.

The godfather who is guided by this implicit characteristics sponsors candidates and political parties during elections and also influences the electoral process to ensure that his party and candidate win. An observation in Nigeria has clearly shown that this phenomenon of sponsorship obviously gives rise to political godfatherism in Nigeria. As Ukhun (2004) remarks, "when individuals, groups or parties throw their financial weight we see at once the emergence of the godfather phenomenon." Emiri (2004) also attribute the rise of godfatherism in Nigeria to what he calls, "individual sponsorship" within the framework of party politics. Individual and party sponsorship arises as a result of the huge cost involve in the running of party machinery and

campaigns, rallies and elections. Due to the level of poverty, it is often beyond individual financial capabilities to undertake electoral funding. Aspirants and political parties therefore seek support and financial assistance from those individuals usually with the requisite financial resources to undertake sponsorships. In the process they emerge as godfathers. Therefore, financial limitations have aided the emergence and rise of political godfatherism in Nigeria. It has also hindered many people from perceiving the dangers inherent as stooges in the hands of a political godfather whose interest may run contrary to the interest of the people.

Obviously then, sponsorship and the role money plays in Nigerian politics can be said to be the main impetus for the rise of political godfatherism. This view is crucial to the understanding of the salient feature of godfatherism especially, as regards Nigeria. The Nigerian political godfather in contemporary politics can be regarded as a "proprietorship, a political entrepreneur" a "capitalist who invests his resources with the intent of making profit. Nnamani (2004) put this succinctly when he stated that:

The godfather is a sole proprietorship, is a merchant who wants to acquire the state as his commercial fiefdom. The godfather has no hint of interest beyond profiteering or beyond personal material gains which the process must afford him.

Chris Uba was also quoted to have declared that, in Anambra state "politics is played as a business deal; and as a businessman and not a philanthropist "I single-handedly sponsored all elected office holders in the state" (Tell, 2005). Obviously in return for sponsorship, he expects profit. However, the profit may not necessarily be financial rewards, but it could be ego related such as prestige, honour, and so on. In a way therefore, the Nigerian political godfather is not altruistic, he has no interest for the development of democracy and society. Unfortunately, personal aggrandizement is now the guided, principle for the present breed of godfathers in Nigeria, as such, they understand nothing order than the maximization of profit and other leverages.

GODFATHERISM AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

The state in Africa remains the instrument through which economic resources are distributed and redistributed. Therefore, politics in Africa revolve around the state, its structures and agencies. This goes to explain the intense struggle to control the apparatuses of the state by members of the political class. In the bid to win and have control of this vital structure in society, godfathers often adopt varying methods to outsmart their rivalries. That is why in Nigeria methods such as thuggery, rigging, violence and manipulations of results often accompany elections. In advance democracies of the world, elections are very important instruments for the determination of the popularity and acceptance of a leader(s). And often times, election results are a true reflection of the votes of the electorates. However, the same cannot be said of Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999. Elections in Nigeria are characterized by thuggery, rigging, manipulations and violence. They are usually the expression of the confirmation of an already chosen godson.

The struggle between and among members of the political class for the purpose of controlling state power accounts for some of the worst violence experienced in Nigeria lately. Two fundamental factors germane in relation to the role of godfatherism in electoral violence in Nigeria. The first relates to the perception of politics as the winner wins all and the loser loses everything (the zero-sum-game politics). Claude Ake put this view succinctly;

The winner in the competition for power wins everything; the losers lose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing, nothing can be better than winning. Thus, everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise, and those who control state power try to keep it by every means. What emerges from this is a politics which does not know legitimacy or legality, only expediency (Ake, 1995).

Apparently, the Nigerian political godfather sees the game of politics from this stand-point. It thus, becomes a 'do-or-die' affair among members of the political class. Nnamani (2003), explains that the Nigerian godfather perceives power as a zero-sum game "where losses of the rival account for his gains". The godfather who has expended money in the election would not accommodate failure as such will adopt every means and avenues to ensure success. He may therefore, employ thugs to rig and or cause chaos before, during and after elections to ensure the success of his favoured candidate(s). It is this understanding of politics by the political class that has made the electoral process in Nigeria prone to manipulations and susceptible to violence. Violence characterizes party primaries, congresses, conventions, rallies and campaign grounds. There are also inter and intra party clashes, assassination and kidnapping of children, women and high profile politicians.

In the run-up to the 2007 general elections, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) primaries in Bayelsa State, South-South Nigeria, two policemen were reportedly killed in a fracas involving two factions of the party, one led by Timi Alaibe and the other by Goodluck Jonathan now the President of Nigeria. In Yobe State, North East Nigeria, three persons were killed in a clash between supporters of All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the (PDP) in 2003. Also in Akwa Ibom State, two persons were shot on the leg and government vehicles and the state PDP secretariat were burnt by protesters who were against the imposition of a candidate on the people by the ruling PDP party in the state. (Punch, November, 2006). Similarly clashes and vandalizations were recorded in other parts of the country. A human right organization (Human Right Watch) in its 2006 report stated that the worst electoral violence in Nigeria took place during the primaries of the ruling PDP party (HRW, 2006).

There are also high profile assassinations and kidnapping and hostage taking of politicians, children and women. For example, Harry Marshall was killed in his Abuja home in March 5, 2003, Bola Ige the then minister of Justice and the Attorney General of the Federation was murdered in his country home in Ogun State in December 23, 2004, others include, Alabo Dikibo, Abigail, Barnabas Igwe, Ogonnaya Uche, Theodore Agwata, Daramola, Funso Williams to mention a few. Also, what can be called the latest trend in Nigeria is the politically motivated

kidnappings and hostage taking of children, wives or parents of politicians and highly placed individuals who may be connected to state power. These negative tendencies in the political system have undoubtedly narrowed the political space for sincere and honest individuals to engage in politics in Nigeria.

The second factor that gives rise to violence that relates to the role of godfatherism in Nigerian politics is incongruence of interest between a godfather and a godson. Olaoye (2007) posited that, incongruence between the interest of the godfather and those of the larger society can result in a struggle between the two. A godson in power position may either align with his benefactor to exploit the people and state resources (e.g. former Governor of Anambra State Mbandunju and his godfather Emeka Ofor) or may align with the rest of society and work for the development of the state (Ngige of Anambra State). In the case of the former there may be no problem as the interest of the godfather is adequately protected and his investment yielding dividends. In the case of the later, the godfather may take extra measures by even expending additional resources to ensure the ouster of his ingrate and disloyal godson from office. Thus, he may resort to creating chaos, violent demonstrations and protests against the regime. It may also include assassination, kidnapping and abduction. This situation played out itself in Anambra State, Enugu State, Oyo State, Plateau State etc.

In Anambra State, the refusal and resistance of the demands of Chris Uba by Chris Ngige led to the kidnap and abduction of Ngige and the subsequent outbreak of violence and his (Ngige) removal from office. Chris Ngige was kidnapped and abducted for several hours by men believed to be working for Chris Uba, Ngige's political godfather. This act, a treasonable Felony is against the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, especially, section (1), subsection 2, and section 37, 38 and 41 of the Nigerian criminal code cap 77, laws of the federation, 1990. Yet nothing was done to Chris Uba, the architect of the act. It only shows that Christ Uba was protected by higher authority, for instance the presidency. In the same vein, Tell magazine report claimed that on November, 24, 2004, persons suspected to belong to anti-Ngige faction of the PDP unleashed violence on Anambra State capital, burning and destroying more than eleven buildings, several vehicles and several persons lost their lives in the process (Tell, 2004). What prompted the disagreement between the two was Ngige's refusal or resistance to the excessive demands of Chris Uba his godfather.

For instance, Chris Uba had demanded from Ngige the appointment of all the commissioners and other personal aid to the governor and also demanded for reimbursement of three billion naira (N3b) being the total cost of his investment in installing Ngige as governor of the state (The Comet, 2003). Ngige's failure to meet these demands led to his kidnap and his subsequent removal from office. Similarly, in Oyo state, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu had placed similar demands on Oladoja his godson and governor of the state. Like Ngige, Oladoja failed and he got the wrath of his godfather Lamidi Adedibu. In a Tell magazine report Adedibu was quoted as saying:

He (Oladoja) won't give me my money he owes me. The man will not just give me a duplicate key to the treasury, despite all my investments in the project...second, he is too stubborn concerning my choice of commissioners, chairmen of government parastatals and boards members (Tell, 2003).

Consequently, Oladoja was impeached as Governor but was reinstated through the court. Apparently, the refusal or resistance on the part of the godson to the demands of his godfather may lead to power tussle between the two. And the obvious implication is violence and chaos in society. However, the question that arises in the mind of many observers is the question of "why would a godson refuse and renege his initial agreements with his godfather?"

A possible explanation to the above question is that, the new status and the attendant power and privileges the godson now have at disposal can influence his attitude and decisions towards his godfather. A clear case in mind is the relationship between Chris Ngige and Chris Uba. For example, in three separate agreements signed before his election and after, Governor Chris Nwabueze Ngige surrendered his executive powers to his godfather, Christ Uba (Tell, 2004). But Chris Ngige, renege, on all agreements he signed within the first six weeks in office. A similar situation occurred between Adedibu and Oladeja in Oyo state. And both states were made difficult for administration by the godfathers. Perhaps, this is what informed Madunuga (2003) to contend that those who are now being referred to, in Nigeria, as political godfathers are not good fathers, but contractors, political contractors. Obviously then, the Nigerian political godfather play the same roles in politics as business contractors do in a market economy. They execute political jobs for which they are paid. This understanding of godfatherism is every important in contemporary Nigeria where politics is now a market phenomenon.

Godfatherism, violence and implications on sustainable democracy in Nigeria. An indication from the above analysis of godfatherism shows two main variants of godfatherism, especially in the contemporary Nigerian context. Thus, godfatherism could be described in both positive and negative terms. As Oguntola- Laguda (2004) remarks:

...by providing a legitimate platform for politicians to achieve their political dreams and objectives, a godfather could be positively conceived. On the contrary, when the godfather gives financial, logistics and moral support to the ambition of a politician with the objective of controlling the politician and seeking financial and other rewards, it becomes negative.

Unfortunately, it is the negative brand of political godfatherism which has become very apparent in Nigeria's political scene in the recent times. This practice is morally wrong as it deprives the people from the dividends of democracy. As Ukhun (2004) contends, "the brand of godfatherism in Nigeria leads one to conclude that it is fuelled and accentuated by egostic impulse." Godfatherism syndrome in Nigeria to say the least, negates the utilitarian principle. And more importantly, the phenomenon of godfatherism has been responsible for most of electoral violence in Nigeria. And this has a very serious implication on the survival of the country's new democracy.

A preponderance of views in political literature asserts that there exist a correlation between political violence and the survival of democracy (Salimano 2004, Ikelegbe, 2004 and Aurel, 2005). Aurel (2005), for example, observed that violence is the greatest threat to democracy in developing countries. In Nigeria, the 1964 general election crisis and the western region's electoral crisis of 1965 contributed immensely to the collapse of parliamentary democracy in Nigeria. The fragile conditions of Nigeria's democracy can be viewed from the high profile assassinations, arsons, and clashes between and within a political party, kidnappings, violence in rallies, campaign grounds, thuggery and rigging of elections. These activities often perpetrated by thugs of godfathers create a sense of insecurity among the electorates and limits the political space. The apparent outcome is low turn-out of voters (political 'apathy') and the withdrawal of honest, sincere and credible individuals from the political scene. Perhaps, this explains why we now have mediocres as political leaders.

The role of the political godfather in Nigeria politics has also worsened the socio-economic conditions of Nigerians. The phenomenon has breed political corruptions, widens the gap between the rich and poor and has also increase unemployment in Nigeria. Again, a wide range of political literature asserts that socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, inequality in income and wealth and erratic economic growth are potential threat to democracy. Corruption, poverty and lack of development were some of the reasons cited by the military government of General Mohammadu Buhari 1984-1985 when they overthrow the civilian administration of Alhaji Shahu Shagari 1979 - 1983.

The negative tendencies of political godfatherism in Nigerian politics have undoubtedly weakened the political structures and institutions in Nigeria. It is important to note that democracy anywhere is sustained when built on virile and stable political structures and institutions. For instance, a strong and stable political party system is a vital factor for an evolving democracy like that of Nigeria. Mainwarring and Scubly (1995) and North (1990) argues that developing democracy need a vibrant party system because according to them, a strong party system enhance and promote the positive attributes essential for democracy to thrive. Strong and stable political structures and institutions also help to establish in a democratic society, the fundamental rules and constraints that help shape interactions in the body polity.

In addition to the forgoing, institutionalized political structures and institutions also help legitimize state authority by encouraging accountability, transparency, representativeness and efficient and effective allocation of scarce resources and good governance (North, 1990). Undoubtedly, Nigeria's nascent democracy can be strengthened and become more effective and responsive to the desires of the citizenry when the political structures and institutions are allowed to evolve unhindered and free from the control and influence of godfathers. However, political structures like political parties and government institutions (the legislature, executive and the judiciary) are weak and soft as a result of the activities of political godfathers in Nigeria. It is not uncommon that political party structures are being hijacked by the

so-called "money- bags" and governmental intuitions made up of selected and appointed members from the political class. Thus, both political structures and government institutions are easily manipulated by these groups of persons.

Elections in Nigeria are thus no longer the important democratic principle through which electorates can elect their leaders. What best describes Nigerian situation is what may be called a "selectocratic system" (a form of governmental system based on the selection of candidates by a section of society rather than the electorates in an election). Consequently, the legislature, the executive and the political parties in Nigeria comprises of persons who are clients to their patrons and who protect the very interest of their patron even at the detriment of society. Marx and Engels clearly stated this in the "manifesto of the communist party (1884). The Executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie. They have their economic power to secure control of the state through the electoral process and thus, acquire a vintage position to design laws, policies and decisions to advance, protect and perpetuate their own class interest, most often by undermining and suppressing the interest of the working class (in McClellan, 1979).

Lenin also advanced the argument that in a capitalist state, elections are meant "to decide once every year which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through bourgeoisie parliamentarianism" (McClellan, 1979). This stooge role of political structures and institutions in Nigerian body politics is a potential threat to the collapse of the country's democracy. Structural and institutional deficiencies of the Nigerian state can lead to the final collapse of civil rule in the country. The susceptibility of the political structures and institutions to the influence and control of forces operating outside the government but within the political system is a great and potential threat to growth and development of democracy in the country.

In recognition of the above, Cuba political experience is worth mentioning. In the 1920s and 1930s, as a result of the weak nature of the political structures and institutions (e.g. the Cuban Congress) Gerardo Machado violated the Cuban constitution by using his control over the Congress to have him re-elected for a six-year term in office. This spark of protests from student and labour unions (Beggan, 2006). The civil unrest created by the activities of the unions laid the platform for the emergence of a military coup in August 1933 led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. By September the same year (1933), Cuban political system had crumbled and had succumbed to complete direct domination by the military. This should serve as a lesson to Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Political godfatherism has become the dominant feature characterizing contemporary Nigerian politics. Their role as a political phenomenon has impacted on the body politics of country negative virtues which are now potential threat to the relatively new democracy in the country. Democracy as practised elsewhere thrive on an

environment of peace and tranquility, popular participation, fundamental human rights, the rule of law and free, fair and open competitive elections. However, the activities of these political gladiators have denied the citizenry from electing their preferred candidates as their leaders. This is detrimental to the sustenance of our nascent democracy. It is against this background that this study posits that there is need for the redefinition of our value system. There is need for us to change our perception of politics as a short-cut to personal wealth.

At presently, both the godfather and the godson see politics from this perspective. This informed the reason why the godfather is willing to invest his capital and use his influence and were necessary adopt uncivilized methods to get his godson control state resources that enables him accumulate wealth even at the detriment of society. In this same vein, the godson also accepts his stooge status as he sees his position as means for self aggrandizement. This perception of politics is detrimental to the growth and development of democracy and society at large. Closely link to the above is the power of the state. The state in the third world wields too much economic and political power. This explains the intense struggle by members of the political class with the sole purpose of controlling the state for personal benefits. For those already in power find it difficult to relinquish it; while those who are out tries to remain relevant within the system.

These objectives of different class of political actors make the struggle more fierce and volatile. It is the candid view of this study that the powers of the state be reduced and this can be done through the empowerment of the citizens and the encouragement of the private sector. Finally, the press and the judiciary be made independent. The independence of the judiciary and the press will further enhance and strengthen democracy in Nigeria. Therefore, the "Freedom of information bill" now before the national assembly be pass into law.

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