

INTERROGATING LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONCERNS OF GOD-FATHERISM, GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTIONALISM IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC PRAXIS*

Abstract

The return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 after another military interruption between 1983 and 1998 came with it a dangerous form of godfatherism which completely changed the landscape of what democracy should be. Democracy, which is supposed to be a form of representative government for the generality of the people, has now become government for the elites and the selected few. People no longer have a say on who governs them and the policies that are made on their behalf. Dividends of democracy no longer get to the people, but the wealth of the nation is shared among the ruling class, their families and their cronies. This paper took a look at the legal and ethical concerns of godfatherism and the resultant effect on the practice of democracy in Nigeria. The study found that governance in Nigeria is no longer participatory but at the dictates of self-acclaimed king makers and godfathers who have turned government into their private estates. It was also found that godfatherism almost always ends in conflicts between the godfathers and their godsons, leaving the masses to suffer for the resultant effects. The paper contended that godfatherism is not a bad practice but turns into a hydra-headed monster when ethics is thrown to the winds and godfatherism is taken to the level of criminality. The methodology used was doctrinal, analytical and qualitative. Secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, and the internet were consulted. As part of the recommendations, this paper called for complete reform of electoral process to render godfatherism unimportant and unattractive. Electronic voting could be a solution to this problem.

Keywords: Nigerian Democracy, Legal Concerns, Ethical Concerns, Godfatherism, Constitutionalism, Governance.

1. Introduction

Forms of government as it relates to governance of States are systems by which a country is ruled, varying widely in how power is distributed and exercised. The key types include Monarchy (as is practiced in the United Kingdom), Democracy, Oligarchy, Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism. Democracy is the most popular form of government, and it is practiced in most countries of the world including Nigeria. It is a system where citizens have direct or indirect say in how the country is governed and could either be Presidential or Parliamentary. Nigeria is a Republic where power is vested in elected representatives. Literally speaking, godfatherism as a concept could be likened to mentorship. Anyone who is venturing into a new field or career would need some sort of mentorship to learn the ropes and succeed. In Igboland, most people who succeed in business go through mentorship by their masters (*Ogas*). A young boy goes into an apprenticeship scheme under an *Oga* and graduates after an agreed number of years. He is then 'freed' and established by his *Oga* who takes pride in the number of people he has mentored and who are doing well in their businesses. In the Corporate world, a new employee is placed under a mentor to learn and be fully integrated into the workings and culture of the Company or Establishment. In the Catholic faith, a person to be newly baptised must have a godfather or godmother who makes sure, together with the parents, that the newly baptised catholic grows spiritually in the catholic faith. Godfatherism in the above instances is about the growth and success of the godson and not what the godfather stands to gain. However, godfatherism in Nigerian politics of today is no longer seen in the above light. It has assumed a mafia-like style. Political godfathers in Nigeria are no longer interested in mentoring their godsons but in perpetrating their grip on power and enlarging their political empires. They carry on their politicking and godfatherism without any regard for any legal and ethical implications. Democratic values and the needs of the people are of little concern to them so long as they remain the lords and masters. This paper seeks to analyse the legal and ethical concerns of godfatherism in Nigerian politics and its resultant effect on the practice of Democracy. We will proceed by looking at the key concepts of godfatherism, ethics and democracy. The propriety or otherwise of the practice of godfatherism with its resultant effects would also come into focus. Attempt would be made to recommend ways of curbing the excesses of self-acclaimed godfathers of the Nigerian political space with a view to having people participate fully in governance.

2. Conceptual Framework

Concepts assume different meanings in different contexts. It would be necessary to have some clarifications of some of the key concepts in this paper to justify their applicability in particular contexts of use.

Democracy

Democracy is a form of government where people have their voices heard. It is often referred to a 'rule by the people'. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, democracy is a system of government where laws, policies, and leadership are decided by the 'people,' either directly or through elected representatives.¹ It is a participatory government in which people vote for their elected representatives. Abraham Lincoln² defined democracy as a 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. Democracy connotes representative government. Nigeria is a democratic Republic where power is vested in elected representatives. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) provides that sovereignty belongs to the people and that participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.³

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¹ Available at <https://www.britannica.com> Retrieved on 24th April, 2025.

² The 16th President of the United States of America.

³ See Section 14 (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended).

Constitutionalism

Constitutionalism is a political theory that emphasises that a government's power should be limited and defined by a constitution. Constitutionalism can also be defined as the doctrine that governs the legitimacy of government action and requires official conduct to be in accordance with pre-fixed legal rules.⁴ It aims at restricting the scope and power of the government, preventing it from becoming overly intrusive or tyrannical. The Constitution of the Federal of Nigeria (CFRN) provides that no person or group of persons shall take control of the Government of Nigeria except in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.⁵

Ethical Concerns

Ethics is a system of moral principles or rules that guide behaviour and help individuals determine what is right or wrong. Ethics is about moralities or moral values, ethical code, ideals, and opinions that people use to analyse or interpret a situation and then decide what is the right way to behave leading to human conduct in society.⁶ The great philosopher, Socrates advised that before carrying out any action, one must first examine oneself to know where the action leads to.⁷ Ethics instill morality for good governance. An ethical concern is a situation where a moral conflict arises, challenging societal principles regarding right and wrong, or good and bad. Ethical concerns are situations where a moral standard is being challenged, requiring individuals or organisations to consider their actions and their potential consequences. Ethical concerns can arise in various contexts, including personal life, business, research, and public policy. Addressing ethical concerns is crucial for maintaining trust, promoting fairness, and ensuring the wellbeing of stakeholders by avoiding excesses.

Godfatherism

As earlier stated, and literally speaking, godfatherism should be a form of mentorship, where a godfather mentors a godson to be better in his chosen area of endeavour. However, the concept of godfatherism in this paper would be seen through the lenses of Nigerian politicians. Godfatherism in Nigerian politics today is the exact opposite of what mentorship should be. The focus is not on being a guide to the godson, but on protecting the political empire of the godfather. Ibrahim defined godfathers in the political sector as 'Men who have the power personally to determine who gets nominated and who wins an election in a State'.⁸ A political godfather is seen as the lord and master of political game, and he alone is the majority. Chimaroke Nnamani (former governor of Enugu State), who had a running battle with his godfather, Senator Jim Nwobodo for over two years, defined godfather from his own personal experience as follows:

...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, the god father is simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes.⁹

Nnamani likened Nigerian godfatherism to the ruthless Mario Puzo's King pins in the Italian Mafia setting. According to him, 'to attain a further greasing of the ever-increasing vast financial empire, political godfatherism in Nigeria has added characterisation of conceit, ego, loquacity, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion'.¹⁰ In the words of Nkwede et al, a godfather is the political merchant while the political godson is the slave who is bought with a huge amount of money under a democratic oath.¹¹ Albert opined that political godfathers use monetary consideration to manipulate the rest of the society and use their influence to block the participation of others in Nigerian politics. Participation and conditions for participation in politics in Nigeria must be dictated by them and they are responsible for most of the pre- and post-election violence in Nigeria.¹² Albert identified five categories of godfathers in Nigerian politics.¹³ The first category are 'Geo-political' or 'Ethnic' Organisations who use their positions to endorse or anoint candidates. Such organisations include but not limited to *Afenifere* for the Yorubas, *Arewa* for the North and *Ohaneze* for the South-East. The second category is what he referred to as 'Geo political' or 'Ethnic father figures' who have served people to the best of their ability and whose political opinions are much respected. The likes of Chief Bola Ige, the slain Minister of Justice and one time Deputy leader of *Afenifere* falls into this category. The third category are rich Nigerians who see sponsorship of political candidates as a source of upward social and economic mobility. Chris Uba of Anambra State, who was the political godfather and sponsor of Governor Chris Ngige in 2003, belongs to this class. The fourth category are those who deal with rich clients which he referred to as 'political entrepreneurs'. They may not be rich, but their clients are. They know what it formally or informally takes to win over constituencies and win elections ... The client provides the money, and the godfather delivers the votes and in exchange, they are accorded important status in government

⁴ Hilaire Barnett, *Constitutional and Administrative Law* (London: Cavendish Publishing Limited, 3rd edition, 2000) 5 cited in Maru Bazezew, 'Constitutionalism' *Mizan Law Review* (2009) Vol. 3 (2) p. 358.

⁵ See Section 1 (2) of the CFRN 1999 (as amended).

⁶ J. Omeregbe, *An Introduction to Philosophical Jurisprudence* (Lagos: Jojo Educational Research & Publishers Ltd, 1994).

⁷ J.A. Onuoha, *Ethics at your Door Post* (Owerri: Ejims Scientific Print, 2007).

⁸ Jibrin Ibrahim. 'The Rise of Nigeria's Godfathers', BBC News, 10 November 2003. Available at <https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3156540.stm> Accessed on 22nd April, 2025.

⁹ Chimaroke Nnamani, 'The godfather phenomenon in democratic Nigeria', *The Source*, 2 June 2003, cited in Isaac Olawale Albert, 'Explaining "Godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics' *African Sociological Review* (2005) 9 (2) pp. 79-105 at p. 80

¹⁰ Chimaroke Nnamani, *supra* (No. 6)

¹¹ S.O. Nkwede, A.S. Ibeogu & O.U. Nwankwo, 'Political Godfatherism and Governance in a Developing Democracy: Insight from Nigeria' *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* (2014) 3 (4) 137-144

¹² Isaac Olawale Albert, 'Explaining "Godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics' *African Sociological Review* (2005) 9 (2) 79-105 at 82.

¹³ *Ibid*, at 90-91.

formed by their clients after elections. They are given juicy contracts as well as slots in ministerial and board appointments. The last category of godfathers are the rich patrons who are willing to provide what it takes for either rich or poor clients to win elections. Dr. Sola Saraki of the old Kwara State falls into this category. This category aligns with Jibrin Ibrahim's position that godfathers include rich men whose contributions to campaign funds of some candidates have helped them to win elections.¹⁴ Some people who readily come to mind in this category are Elon Musk who used his money to ensure Donald Trump's reelection in America. Elon Musk was rewarded with the position of the Senior Advisor to the President of the United States. Another person is Carlos Slim in Mexico whose financial support helped Vincent Fox break the Institutional Revolutionary Party's seventy-one-year grip on power in Mexico. One can easily identify godfathers by their media presence. The godfathers make effective use of greedy mass media who are willing to serve the interest of the highest bidder. They are always on the media whom they pay to launder their images. Their loyalists are in the habit of sending regular congratulatory messages on how they are God-sent and in the business of lifting the down-trodden out of poverty. They are granted regular interviews to perpetrate their lies.

3. Emergence of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics

Godfatherism has always been part of politics in Nigeria. The difference is that what used to be is no longer what we have now as godfatherism has assumed a horrific and criminal dimension. During the colonial era, the colonial masters instituted the slightly educated persons as warrant chiefs, which, in those days, could be considered godfathers of anyone who aspired to belong to the class of people who made decisions. The few elites who fought for Nigerian Independence later became political godfathers in the first republic.¹⁵ These crops of godfathers include the Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir. Ahmadu Bello, the leader of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), who begot the likes of Tafawa Balewa and later Abubakar Rimi and Balarabe Musa as godsons. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group (AG), the popular political party in the West had as godsons Akintola, Ogbemudia, Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, Chief Bisi Onabanjo and a host of others. In the South, the political godfather of this era was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader of the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC) later changed to National Convention of Nigerian Citizens. His godsons included Michael Okpara, Mbazulike Amaechi, and later Jim Nwobodo, Sam Mbakwe and others. The only difference between these early godfathers and the contemporary ones is that they supported and nurtured their godsons positively rather than negatively.¹⁶ They motivated their adopted sons to higher levels of political morality and made it necessary for them to be accountable to those who voted them into office. The main pre-occupation of these early godfathers was the wellbeing of the masses and to ensure that human and capital development get to grassroots. Their godfatherism added value and experience to governance. On the contrary, what we have now as political godfathers are people who are protecting their narrow personal interests. They do not even have the interests of their godsons at heart, let alone the interests of the masses. They only need their godsons to remain relevant in Nigerian politics.

Godfatherism as we have it today could be blamed on the incursion of the military into politics. Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha sowed the seed of criminality in godfatherism and Abdulsam Abubakar watered it. General Abdulsalam Abubakar released Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (a retired military officer and former military Head of State) from prison and made him President in 1999 under a constitution midwived by the military. Since then, godfathers have taken over the political space and no one can break through unless you are adopted. Politics is now a battle of godfathers who will use all in their possession to outwit the others. If as a candidate, you do not have a godfather who is buoyant enough, these days in foreign currencies, then your chances of being nominated are very slim. The only reason why Peter Obi, who had the support of Nigerians from every corner, did not become President of Nigeria in 2023, was because he did not have a 'godfather'. The godfather politics in PDP forced him to a little-known political party. Politics in Nigeria is no longer about being qualified but about how strong your godfather is.

4. Drivers of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics

In other democracies, where politics is played along the lines of political parties' ideologies, the role of godfathers, if any, would be reduced to the barest minimum, as in the United States of America, where you have the Democrats and the Republicans with clear cut ideologies. Why is the practice of democracy different in Nigeria? Why has Nigeria become a fertile ground for the practice of politics of godfatherism? This paper identifies some factors that are driving godfatherism in Nigerian politics. These include Poverty, Unemployment, Transactional/Money Politics, Power of Incumbency, and the Elite Theory.

Poverty: More than half of the Nigerian population live below the extreme poverty level of less than \$1 a day. Poverty has become endemic in Nigeria and is one of the major drivers of godfatherism in Nigerian politics. Politicians have weaponised poverty to enable them to take over complete control of the political space. According to Chimaroke Nnamani, poverty creates the possibility of the emergence of godfathers. The prevalence of poverty makes it easy for godfathers to rise and pervade the environment of not well-structured politics. Poverty makes the masses vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation so much so that a voter can sell his or her vote for something as little as few cups of rice and a paltry sum of ₦1,000. Electoral officers and *ad hoc* electoral staff who are paid next to nothing to work during elections are easily financially induced by these godfathers. Youths are recruited as thugs to do the bidding of the godfathers with as little as ₦20,000 as monthly stipend.

¹⁴ Jibrin Ibrahim, *supra* (No. 7).

¹⁵ D.M. Igbinu & U.C. Okiolie, 'Godfatherism and its Threat to the Nigeria's Nascent Democracy' *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law* (2020) Issue 17, p. 97.

¹⁶ Isaac Olawale Albert, *supra* (No. 11) p. 88

Transactional Politics/Money Politics: Closely related to Poverty is transactional politics. Transactional politics is a politics of give and take; rub my back I rub your back. Godfathers invest in godsons and expect return on their investments. These returns on investment include nomination of 80% to 100% of those to serve in the cabinet of their godsons and having complete control of the State House of Assembly. Transactional politics is also a politics where money is used to procure youths to discredit credible candidates on social media. At a recent event at John Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. in the United States of America on 24th April 2025, Peter Obi speaking on 'Politics and Change in Nigeria', warned that Nigeria's political space is being increasingly corrupted by money-driven tactics, where young people are allegedly mobilised with stipends to promote confusion and misinformation. In his words: 'In the transactional politics of Nigeria, some people pay them (youths) to cause confusion. Go to social media – those being paid =N=20,000, =N=40,000 monthly to abuse you are the same youths you are fighting for.'¹⁷ The godfathers, who in most cases are the leaders of political parties and determine what happens there, would make regulations that would give them an edge over others. Some of these regulations would be so stringent that no average person would be able to surmount them. Fees for Nomination Forms are so outrageously exorbitant that an average person cannot afford it. Interested candidates would then be forced to approach the godfathers for support. Money, and not political ideology, play an important role in party conventions. During the 2023 political parties' conventions for nominations of flag bearers, U.S. Dollars were openly used as a tool to secure the votes of delegates. A delegate for the presidential candidate nomination could go home with as much as \$50,000. Of course, with the amount of money involved, the fight is between godfathers and 'the ordinary Nigerian had no voice in all the fights; they watched from far off'.¹⁸

Unemployment: The unemployment rate among youths in Nigeria is so high that they would be ready to do anything to eke a living. People who are willing and capable to work are unable to find a suitable job, thereby making them remain idle. Since an idle mind is the devil's workshop, the unemployed youth population has become a fertile ground for recruitment of foot soldiers for political godfathers. Many of our unemployed youths are being lured through the activities of godfatherism into committing acts of political violence and thuggery. Thugs and *Otimkpus* (praise singers) are recruited from these young and virile young men and women. The dearth of opportunities in Nigeria has driven a good number of youths to a life of 'anything goes'. A gainfully employed youth would have no time with political godfathers.

Power of Incumbency: The fact that most elective positions in Nigeria are for two terms give the incumbents the opportunity and power to become godfathers unto themselves and their loyalists. They have the States funds and the political structure of the State at their disposal to campaign for their second tenure and for all the members of the State House of Assembly. This will ensure that the State House of Assembly becomes an extension of the Executive instead of a check on the excesses of the Executive. Godfatherism is taken to an extremely dangerous level with the incumbent governor being the godfather and the candidate. This will extend to when he is leaving office and will need to anoint a godson who would be his stooge.

The Elite Theory: The stratification of the society into two categories – those at the top and those at the bottom – has made the quest to make it to the top and remain there fiercer. People who are already at the top of the political echelon would want to perpetuate their grip and would only allow their likes to remain at that level. The proponents of the Elite Theory, Vilfredo Pareto¹⁹ and Karl Marx,²⁰ posited in their works that political elites insulate and isolate themselves from their society and try as much as possible to reproduce themselves from within. They do everything possible to block non-elites from joining their membership. They reproduce themselves on an individual and selective basis in a process which Pareto referred to as the 'circulation of elites'.²¹ For Marx and Pareto, there is no vacancy for membership for anybody not in the class of elites. However, Mosca²² believes that it is possible for a non-elite member to join the elite class through their social, economic and professional efforts. In his belief, there exists in many societies people that could be referred to as sub-elites, i.e. those who facilitate communication between the elite and non-elite and thus potential tools for relatively large-scale elite recruitment. These sub-elites themselves do all they can to join the mainstream political elite class. What is easily noticed in Africa, Nigeria inclusive is that the transition of such group of people into political elite class is facilitated by one or other form of 'godfather'. Mosca maintains that the elite theory points to the concentration of power in the hands of a minority group which 'perform all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys the advantages that power brings'.²³ But Pareto and Marx argued that it is still a case of selective individual recruitment.

5. Effects of Godfatherism on Democratic Governance

Governance is about leadership which helps in driving every meaningful society into national growth and development. Good governance is often characterised by transparency, accountability, participation and responsiveness to the needs of the people. Good leadership and good governance are brought about by having competent and capable people at the helm of affairs. Ironically, the choice of godsons by godfathers is not based on competence and capability, but on who would do their biddings with 100 percent loyalty. What the godfathers give us as leaders is a breed of incompetent people instead of those with problem

¹⁷ Peter Obi, "The Same Youths We Fight For are Paid To Fight Us", Available at <https://thenigerialawyer.com> April 25, 2025. Accessed April 25, 2025.

¹⁸ Isaac Olawale Albert, *supra* (No. 11) p. 89.

¹⁹ Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society* 4 Volumes (New York, 1935) cited in Isaac Olawale Albert, 'Explaining "Godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics' *African Sociological Review* (2005) 9 (2) pp. 79-105 at p. 80

²⁰ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, 1926) cited in Isaac Olawale Albert, 'Explaining "Godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics' *African Sociological Review* (2005) 9 (2) pp. 79-105 at p. 80.

²¹ Isaac Olawale Albert (No. 11) p. 80

²² Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York and London, 1939) cited in *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

solving capabilities needed to adequately address systemic issues of poverty. Their leadership style is characterised by corruption and injustice. What we have today is democracy defined by coercion and intimidation and government of the selected, by the selected and for the selected. According to Chukwuemeka and Orji, the emergence of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic posed a great threat not only to good governance but also to the socio-economic stability of democratic governance.²⁴ In their words, '... one of the most disturbing and damaging influence of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic was in the domain of making nonsense of a truly free, fair and credible electoral process.'²⁵ Some of the effects of godfatherism in Nigerian politics include the following:

Electoral Malpractices: Elections are no longer credible, free and fair when godfathers use all in their possession to ensure the success of their godsons in the election. For them, elections must be won at all costs. They use money, intimidation, thuggery, violence, snatching of ballot boxes, mutilation of election results, threat to the lives of electoral officers and the likes to make sure their godsons are elected.

Political Apathy: Credible Nigerians who would ordinarily participate in elective positions stay away from politics because of the unfair play in the Nigerian politics. Corrupt politicians are recycled, and the political space is left for the godfathers and their recruits.

Corruption: The level of corruption in the game of politics in Nigeria because of godfatherism is unimaginable.

Violence: The desperation of godfathers to ensure the victory of their anointed godsons brings with it a lot of violence and bloodshed. Willing youths are armed with dangerous weapons to stop anybody who is in the way of the godfathers. These arms are never ever retrieved after elections and that is the reason for proliferation of arms in our society today.

Non-Performance of Elected Officials: Elected officials are only accountable to their godfathers because they are aware that it is not the votes of the electorate that got them into office, but the game of their godfathers.

Lack of Dividends of Democracy: The purpose of godfatherism in Nigeria's politics today is to serve the interests of godfathers and not for the dividends of democracy to get to the masses. Godfathers are predators. They squander the resources of the government and nothing would be left for the masses and the development of States.

Omotola J.S. summarised the effect of godfatherism on Nigerian politics thus:

The role of godfathers in the electoral process has serious negative implications for sustainable democracy which requires that the game be played according to the rules, with people with a democratic mindset calling the shot at all levels of governance. The actions of godfathers impede the emergence of true democrats in governance.²⁶

6. Godfather/Godson Conflicts: Rivers State as a Case Study

Since relationships between godfathers and godsons are transactional, the anointment of godsons usually comes with an agreement. It is usually a case of 'rub my back and I rub your back' – I get you into office and you do my biddings. These agreements include having the godfather nominate about 80% to 100% of those to serve in the godson's cabinet, and complete control of the State House of Assembly, which is a ready tool for the impeachment of the governor once there is a disagreement. However, both godfather and godson have contradictory higher goals that can never bind them together. History has shown that most of the pacts between godfathers and godsons in Nigeria's fourth republic have mostly always ended in conflicts and chaos. The problem starts after the election when the godson is expected to implement the agreement reached with his godfather. Trouble usually starts when the godfather becomes so overbearing that the godson is unable to fulfil his mandate to the people, he becomes rebellious.

In 2003, on the heels of Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju falling out with his political godfather, Chief Emeka Offor, Chief Chris Uba took over the political space of Anambra State. He single-handedly nominated Dr. Chris Ngige, sponsored his campaigns, and fought for his 'victory'²⁷ at the polls. Even before he was sworn in as Governor, problem had started. The agreement signed between the godfather and his godson, and which allegedly involved oath taking was all over the media space. Dr. Chris Ngige claimed that his godfather's demand kept increasing including paying him huge sums of money monthly way beyond his tenure as the governor of the State. Their fight raged on until Ngige was finally removed as governor.

The story between the godfather of politics in old Kwara State, Dr. Sola Saraki and the Governor in 1999, Mohammed Lawal is not different. The only difference is that Lawal was a rich godson and did not depend on the funds of his godfather. Dr. Saraki made sure Lawal was not reelected in 2003 and implanted his son, Bukola Saraki as Governor of Kwara State. The Ibadan chaos between 2003 and 2006 that led to loss of lives and properties was a result of the disagreement between Chief Lamidi Adedibu and his godson, Governor of the Old Oyo State, Rasheed Ladoja. Their disagreement polarised the State House of Assembly and Ladoja was impeached in January 2006. He was reinstated after 11 months sequel to the Supreme Court decision of 7th December 2006. The case of Governor Mala Kachalla of Borno State and his godfather, Senator Alimodu Sheriff, is not different and as a result, Kachalla was not reelected for a second term in office. Chief Jim Nwobodo of Enugu State and his godson, Chimaroke Nnamani had their own share of fights. With his experience, one would think that Chimaroke Nnamani would be a different godfather to his godson, Sullivan Chime, but that was not to be. The father of all godfathers,

²⁴ E.O. Chukwuemeka & R.O. Orji 'Give them their Rights: A Critical Review of Godfather and Godson Politics in Nigeria' *Review of Public Administration and Management* (2013) 208-219.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 214

²⁶ J.S. Omotola, 'Godfathers and the 2007 Nigerian General Elections' *Journal of African Elections* Vol. 6 (2) 134-154 at 148.

²⁷ The word "victory" is put in inverted comas because he was eventually removed as Governor by the Court and Peter Obi declared winner of Anambra governorship election.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has Lagos State in his pockets. You either play by his rules or you get kicked out. Ambode, the former governor of Lagos State, who could not secure the ticket for a second term in office, would be better placed to tell his story. The list goes on and on.

The one that is fresh in our minds and still raging as at the time of writing this paper, is the fight between governor of Rivers State and his godfather, Nyesom Wike, the current FCT Minister and former Governor of Rivers State. Their disagreement has led to the declaration of State of Emergency in Rivers State. Wike, single-handedly, and to the disapproval of most of his allies in PDP, picked a technocrat who worked as Accountant General of the State under his regime, Sim Fubara as the PDP governorship candidate for the 2023 elections. Wike crisscrossed the length and breadth of Rivers State campaigning for Fubara. Wike used his state apparatus, his money, his political structure, his foot soldiers, his political wizardry to ensure that Fubara got elected as governor of the State and was sworn in on 29th May 2023. As would be expected, there must have been an agreement which this writer is not privy to, but one thing that was glaring to everybody was that Fubara's cabinet was basically a continuation of Wike's cabinet, and the House of Assembly is populated by Wike's loyalists. Not long after, people started noticing the cracks which finally turned into a full-blown fight, with Wike openly confessing that he wanted Fubara completely removed as governor. This he tried to do with his controlled House of Assembly with impeachment threat. Fubara had to contend with a hostile House of Assembly led by the godsons of Wike. The rest is history.

The question with all these conflicts is where the people who are governed come into the equation. Democracy is supposed to be government of the people, but with all the fights of the supposed representatives of the people and their godfathers, governance is brought to a halt and what we have is the battle of the 'political elites'. The grass suffers from the fighting of the elephants.

7. Legal and Ethical Concerns of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics

Achieving good governance requires good ethical practices. A democracy without considering ethics will be selfish and degenerate into a form of governance of the elected, by the elected and for the elected.²⁸ A country where the National Assembly would sit on tens of millions of Naira as salary and allowances and spend weeks discussing a minimum wage of Seventy thousand Naira, is to say the least, a country without ethics and morals. Additionally, politics should be played in accordance with the laws of a State. Political godfathers of Nigeria's fourth republic care less about the legal and moral implications of what they do. People are killed and maimed just for their godsons to be in power. They take actions that clearly go against the laws of the land just to satisfy their needs and maintain their ego. The declaration of state of emergency in Rivers State just for Wike to govern the State by proxy clearly goes against the provisions of section 305 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The voice vote of the National Assembly approving the declaration of state of emergency was to say the least laughable when the Constitution clearly provides that the votes of 2/3 majority of all members of the National Assembly would be required for such approval. What else would one expect from a Senate President who is a product of politics of godfatherism. A person who never participated in the primaries for the senatorial ticket but later made his way to the senate and became the senate president because he is the anointed of President Tinubu. Nobody knows what the law is in Nigeria anymore unless the Supreme Court makes a pronouncement. Actions are taken by these godfathers without considering the legal implications. Most, if not all our elected officials are products of godfatherism, and for them, anything goes, whether it is morally or legally wrong.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of democracy is achieved when the interests of the people are well served. This paper found that the ideals of democracy have been relegated to the background in Nigeria with the crop of political godfathers occupying the political space. It is common practice in Nigeria for individuals to seek support and protection of a godfather because one cannot get nominated or elected into any political office without identifying with one godfather or another.²⁹ The godfather puts in place all it takes for the candidate to win by all means – money, violence, and rigging of elections. Godfatherism takes away the voice of the people. 'The people's power to decide the affairs of their State is wrestled off their hands and concentrated in the hands of a minority; a group of self-seeking individuals poised on using the government for the achievement of their selfish purpose'.³⁰ The wellbeing of the Nigerian people is sacrificed at the altar of the needs of few politicians and their families and cronies. Godfatherism cripples democracy and good governance.

In view of the above, it is hereby recommended as follows:

- a) That elective positions in Nigeria should be for one term of four or five years to do away with the power of incumbency in seeking reelections.
- b) The President of Nigeria should not be responsible for appointing the INEC Chairman for the independence of INEC to be meaningful.
- c) Electronic voting should be introduced to reduce incidences of election manipulation.
- d) Independence of the Judiciary should be strengthened so that the Executive would not use them to replace the electorate. The number of pre- and post-election petitions are alarming and godfathers are not afraid to tell the masses to go to court since they can influence the outcome of the petitions.
- e) Remuneration of elected officials should be reduced and made to align with the earnings of the generality of Nigerians in order to discourage people from making politics a do-or-die affair.
- f) Youths should be employed and empowered to reduce the number of youths who could be easily used for political thuggery and violence.

²⁸ Okonkwo, J.I 'Democratisation in a Nationalist State: The Hermeneutics of the Nigerian Social Philosophy' *Journal of Contemporary and Science Education* (2022) Vol. 1 (1).

²⁹ Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999).

³⁰ S.C. Ugwu and D.I. Ugwuja, 'Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: Implications' *International of Science and Technology* (2016) I (1) pp. 58-62.