Godfatherism and Good Governance in Benue State: 
An Analysis of the Fourth Republic (1999-2020)

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Abstract

Godfatherism is a hydra-headed monster in Benue and the country at large. It has negatively impacted on the practice of popular political participation and good governance. The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of godfatherism on good governance in Benue State in the Fourth Republic. The paper adopted theory of prebendalism as its framework of analysis. The methodology employed in this paper is a qualitative approach using secondary sources of data. It was found that godfatherism poses great threat to good governance in Benue State. it was also found that the practice of godfatherism in Benue has eroded principles of accountability, transparency, contestability and inclusiveness. The activities of godfatherism have promoted electoral malpractices, violence and political corruption. In order to mitigate the effects of godfatherism on good governance in the state, the paper recommends among others that the electoral laws should be reformed to limit the funding of political parties and their candidates by individuals and corporate organizations and government should diversify the economy in order to create employment for youths, who carry out the evil biddings of godfathers and their godsons for mere peanut. On the whole, there is dare need to sensitize the citizens on the importance of participating in election and the citizens consciousness should be arouse on demanding proper accountability and stewardship from political leaders.

Keywords: Godfatherism, Good Governance, Democracy, Accountability, Inclusiveness and Prebendalism

Introduction

One of the concepts that have gain currency since the inception of democracy in the country is that of godfatherism. In fact, there is no section of the country where there are no political godfathers whose philosophy, ideology and activities determine party affiliation, political behaviour and outcome of elections in their areas (Albert, 2005). However, the phenomenon of godfatherism is neither new nor peculiar to Nigeria. Societies have always been stratified into two seemingly opposing groups, the upper and the lower classes, where the latter largely owe their material existence to the former (Varma, 2006). Evidences exist to show that the phenomenon of godfatherism manifests in the European and American political systems (Albert (2005). For instance, France had what is referred to as ‘godfathers of industry’, which connotes ‘corporate titans that is businessmen with the most clout, and an interesting class of people who keeps the economy running’. These people manipulate the system either to further their selfish interests or to advance the cause of the poor. This trend also manifests in America through American films, where godfathers, are associated with mafia gangs and are usually the
‘big boss’ who surrounds himself with all manner of criminal, often violent, clientele (Albert, 2005, p. 81).

The recent activities of some Nigerian godfathers could be likened to attributes of mafianism; however, some still see the existence of godfathers as the balancer of power in a democracy. Ezenekwe (2006) believes in the need to have a good-hearted individual (people’s hero) at the sole realm of absolute power, a godfather to distribute power as he deems, and anoints who rules. But, godfatherism has taken a strange dimension in Nigeria’s political environment. It has become a menace pulling down the foundations of masses-driven governance, thereby denying Nigerians the much-deserved dividends of good governance (Bello, 2011).

In Benue State the phenomenon of godfatherism came into limelight in the Second Republic (Jibo, 2014). Since then, the state has experience crises as a result of the ungodly practices of godfathers. From the eight years of Akume administration, crises emanated between the Governor and his godfathers; Dr Iyorchia Demenongo Ayu and Mr. Barnabas Gamade. Between 2007 and 2015 it was the Governor, Mr. Gabriel Suswam and his godfather, Mr. George Akume and during this present dispensation, there is also an ongoing restrains relation between the Governor, Mr. Samuel Ortom and his godfather, Mr. George Akume. At the centre of these crises is a political battle for the control of state power, political appointment and wealth accumulation (Babajide, 2019). In all these, all that defines good governance is relegated to the background. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the impact of godfatherism on good governance in Benue State with emphasis on the Fourth Republic.

**Conceptual Issues**

**Godfatherism**

Literature on 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 (Williams 2004, p. 34).

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.

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 super ordinate 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 Emiri (2004) 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.

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 permanent. 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. This has been the situation in Benue State since the inception of democracy in 1999.

**Good Governance**

The phraseology good governance was introduced in 1989 by World Bank (2003) as a requirement for economic recovery in Africa. According to World Bank (2003), governance is defined as the exercise of political power to manage a nation’s affairs. World Bank expanded the concept of governance, it argued that governance consist in the exercise of authority in the name of the people while good governance is “doing so in a way that respect of integrity and the needs of everyone within the state (World Bank, 2003, p.25). World Bank conception of good governance rest on two important attributes of inclusiveness and accessibility. Inclusiveness connotes a situation where all citizens are guarantee certain rights including equality before the law and the right to actively participants in governance process through active participation in the decision making process. The principle of inclusiveness is against marginalization of people on the basis of religion, gender, ethnicity and other primordial factors. On the hand, accountability refers to the idea that those who are elected or selected to act in the name of the people are answerable to the people for failure as well as credit for the success (World, Bank, 2003).

Elaborating on the concept of accountability, the World Bank (2003) introduced the concepts of contestability and transparency. Contestability here implies that citizens should have choices among government leaders, policies and agencies. In other words, citizens should have alternatives to choose or select from when it comes to leadership, policies and programmes. From this conception, it obvious this principle can only be obtainable in the democratic system of governance that provides some level of latitudes for citizens to express their rights and privileges. Transparency implies that citizens have rights to regular information on what “government officials and supposed to be doing, what they are actually doing and who is responsible” (World Bank, 2003, p.29).

From the foregoing, it is clear that good governance is associated with the principles of accountability, contestability, transparency and inclusiveness. Also, it can be observed that these principles are supposed to be the cornerstone of any democratic society.

**Theoretical Framework**

The argument in this paper is anchored on theory of prebendalism. The term prebendalism is usually said to be used first by Richard Joseph. Richard theory of prebendalism was influence by the works of Marx on the feudal systems in Europe and China. He presented a ‘prebend’ as constituting an office of state which an individual procures either through a formal process or as a reward for loyal service to a feudal lord (Joseph, 1999). His work focuses on making the reader perceive prebendal politics from the latter context: namely the attainment and use of public office as a reward for loyalty to a lord or ruler (Albert, 2005). Basically, prebendalism
refers to the practice of utilizing official positions by public office holders for selfish personal gains. Joseph (1999) conceptualized it as the pattern of political behaviour which reflects, as its justifying principle, that the offices of the state may be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of the office holders as well as that of their reference or support groups. In Nigeria, state political offices are primarily regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by the office holders to generate material benefits for themselves and for other ethnic, cultural or community groups (Ugwuani & Nwokedi, 2015).

In Nigeria political system, the methods used for capturing the state power are clientelist in nature (Albert, 2005). It is in this respect that he described clientelism, often referred to as ‘patron-client relations ties’, as an essential tool for advancing prebendal politics. Elaborating on the nature and character of patron-client relationship in prebendal politics, Joseph (1999, p. 56) observed that:

An individual seeks out patrons as he or she moves upward socially and materially; such individuals also come to accept ties of solidarity from their own clients which they view as fundamental to the latter's security and continued advancement as well as their own. Clientelism therefore is the very channel through which one joins the dominant class and a practice which is then seen as fundamental to the continued enjoyment of the perquisites of that class.

Joseph (1999) suggested that it is a common practice in Nigeria for individuals to seek the support and protection of a godfather while trying to acquire the basic social and material goods.

Deriving from the above, Ugwuani & Nwokedi (2015) identified two major perspectives that explain prebendalism in Nigeria: first, as a situation where political offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by their holders and actually used as such to generate material benefit for themselves. Second, as a form of political clientele in which people ascend to political offices through the active support of power brokers (political God Fathers), ethnic or kin groups who must be rewarded in sundry ways including using the trappings of such office. From these two perspectives, prebendalism could be taken to mean the use of political offices for direct selfish personal gains or to indirectly benefit political masters, cultural groups or other kin groups.

Undoubtedly, prebendalism has become the dominant and defining characteristics of politics in Benue state. Individual clientelistic strategies as evidenced in godfather politics in the state can partly be explained in the context of what Tilly (1985, p.67) described as a ‘security racket’. In this case, a prominent person or institution creates a security problem and turns around to ask his society to pay for solving the same problem. What a typical godfather does is to create tension in the political system and then present himself to members of the public as the only person that could help others to find their ways out of the ‘dark tunnel’. He makes it difficult for members of his political party who fail to recognise his authority to get nominated for elective offices. Those who recognise his ‘worth’ thus go to him to be ‘specially anointed’ and things work positively for them automatically.

Research Methodology

The paper depends on secondary sources of data drawn from text books, journals, official publications, conference papers, internet sources and documentaries which were consulted. The data for this paper were analyzed using the discourse analytic method. This study adopts textual or documentary
analysis. Textual or documentary analysis involves rigorous and systematic analysis of the contents of documents that are relevant to the subject under investigation.

**Historical Background to Godfatherism in Benue Politics**

It is incontrovertible that Senator Joseph Tarka was the major political actor in Middle and consequently Benue State. His role in the political process in the build up to the 1979 elections could be likened to that of political godfather (Shija, 2010). During this period, he was an influencer of who get what, when and how as politics in the state was concerned. Tarka secured places for his old friends and favourite in the legislative houses at state and national level (Hembe, 2003). Also, this was illustrated in the emergence of Aper Aku as the flagbearer of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and consequently, the Governor of the state despite his initial resistance in preference of Mr. Isaac Shaahu (Hembe, 2006). Hembe also cited several other instances where J.S. Tarka demonstrated his role as the decider of who occupies which political position was the nomination process in Nyamatsor State Constituency where replaced the nomination of Dzua Iyortom with Abugh Ashwe and in Gboko West Federal Constituency F. Abagen with his own son, Mbakorakar Tarka (Jibo, 2014). Expectedly, these disappointed members decamped with their supporters to other political parties.

However, unlike the current practice political godsons are expected received list of those to make cabinet members; Aku had little inference from Tarka (Hembe, 2006). Aku selected a group of well-educated Tiv elites, all the nine-member team of his commissioners and special advisers were selected from the Tiv area had at least post-primary education and only two had less than universities degree.

Having firm control of the state government, Aku group proceeded to take control of the state secretariat of the NPN. The chairmanship of the party was zoned to the Idoma group and J.C. Obande became the first state chairman of the NPN (Hembe, 2006). With the demise of J.S. Tarka on the 30th March, 1980, the Governor Aku and Isaac Shaahu contested for and to occupy the status of J.S. Tarka in Benue politics. According to Hembe (2006, p.379) Aku argued that:

> those of us who were close to the late senator know that before he passed away in London, he summoned Governor Aku to his bedside where he entrusted the leadership of the Tiv politics in particular and Benue State in general.

The author also presented another episode that supported the argument that J.S. Tarka indeed handed the mantle of leadership in Benue to Aku. The story presents that: “Aku inherited the power at Korinya where l’orakpen I’shu and Clement Shamiga vividly explained how Tarka passed the mantle of leadership to Aku”. There a lot of inconsistency about the place where the exercise was done. For instance, Hembe (2006, p.231) cited Ishu and Shamiga that the baton was handed to Aku in Jato Aka in Turan. According to the story:

> Before the gubernatorial nomination in the 1979, Tarka took Aku a place near Jato Aka’s grave in Turan. He left Aku some distance away and went to the grave for consultation with Jato Aka. When he came back from the grave, Tarka spit into Aku palms and asked him to rub the palm on (Aku’s) face. As Aku did so, Tarka whispered: I have paid the debt.

According to the story, the debt was a leadership debt which Tarka owned to the Ukan people which Aku belongs. It claimed that at the Lafia Convention of 1957, the
leadership of the Tiv people was given to Achirga Abuul, an Ukan man like Aku. But his inability to speak in English led to Tarka taking over the leadership role ordained for the Ukan people (Hembe, 2006). Those who supported this argument firmly believed that, Aku leadership role demanded directly from Swem made from the remains of Takuruku’s skull and handed over to Tarka by Jato Aka.

On the other hand, Isaac Shaahu also claimed to have got Late Tarka’s blessing to lead the Tiv. Shaahu therefore wanted not only to fill the vacuum created after the demise of J.S. Tarka. The contestation for political power in the state between these two groups (Aku and Shaahu) resulted to needless crises in the ruling NPN (Shaminja, 2010).

With the lifting of the ban on political parties and consequently the formation of politics, several Benue politicians notably, Chief Barnabas Gemade, Iyorcha Ayu and David Mark were at the forefront of the formation of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Their roles in the formation of this party made them formidable and influencer in Benue politics. These personalities with deep pocket bared a great financial burden of the party, therefore places them at the liberty to influences decisions especially on sensitive like the nomination of who becomes the Governor of the state. This situation profoundly found expression in 1999 when Akume and Mike Aku ran for the governorship ticket of the PDP. At this period, Chief Barnabas Gemade was the influencer who allied with David Mark in favour of Akume. A blossom relationship was established between Akume and David Mark who wielded influence across the Benue South senatorial district of Benue State. George Akume was elected governor as a beneficiary of an unequal alliance between Gemade and Ayu (Jibo, 2014).

The financial contribution of Iorychia Ayu to the emergence of George Akume as the Governor made him the godfather in Benue politics. It on record that from 1999-2006, Akume consulted him on virtually all key decision relating to governance in the state (Lawal, 2018). This explains why Ayu was the sole Benue nominee for Ministerial appointment for the first five years of Akume rule as the Governor of the state (Jibo, 2014). However, the cordial relationship between Iorychia (godfather) and Governor Akume (godson) did not last for a long time. On 15th November, 2012, Ayu parted ways from Akume and was welcome home to the PDP by the then Governor Gabriel Suswam. The development created a big gulf between Akume and Ayu. This development made the then Governor, George Akume the godfather in Benue politics. As a result he had a strong influencer who succeeds his as the governor of the state. Shija (2010, p.13) agreed with this assertion that:

> when Akume claimed that he made Suswam governor, it was only partially correct. His endorsement of Suswam in the rescheduled state congress of the PDP on 12th December, 2006 was of limited impact because it did not lessen the anxiety in the Suswam camp, which could neither trust nor rely on Akume at that crucial stage of the contest.

The above quotation further buttresses the influential of role played by Akume in the emergence of Suswam as the flag bearer of the PDP and consequently the Governor of the state.

Not long after the inauguration of his administration, the relationships between these two personalities begin to deteriorate. On several occasions, the then Governor Suswam berate Akume for “squatting to share funds” from the federation account. The feud between
Suswam and Akume degenerated to a dangerous stage to the extent that, the godfather was doubtful of his senatorial ticket in the PDP. This resulted to his (Akume) decamping to the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) with a sizeable supporters a few days to the PDP primaries. In other to plant a new governor, Akume brought in the 2011 election Professor Steve Ugba Unongo’s nephew to unseat Suswam. The dream never materializes as the Governor won his second term at the poll and in the court.

In the run up to 2015 general elections, Ortom resigned his appointment as a minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria seeking to be governor of Benue State under the platform of the PDP. However, his political dream was aborted in the PDP when the party's ticket was given to Terhemen Tarzoor. Typical of desperate Nigerian politicians, Ortom decamped to the opposition APC where he emerged candidate of the APC in the April 2015 governorship election in the state. This happened like a story in Nigeria film, as it were, until the day Ortom was pronounced candidate of the party, he was a member of the PDP and gubernatorial aspirant of the party. In important to note that, the only person that has such powers in the state was the Senator Akume, the leader of the party in the state. The emergence Ortom as the flag bearer of the All Progressive Congress in the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Benue state clearly undermines the principle of internal democracy.

In the election, Tarzoor polled 313,878 votes to come second against Ortom’s 422,952 votes (INEC, 2015). Ortom’s woes were also compounded by his opponents in his party who were pained by the manner he was imposed on the party as its gubernatorial candidate. One of them was his rival for the APC ticket, Emmanuel Jime who was in January 2015 chosen by the party as its consensus gubernatorial candidate before Akume gave Ortom the party ticket. A leader of the party in the state, Sen. Joseph Waku was once equally up in arms against the governor. Apart from Tarzoor, Jime and Waku who were also in court contesting Ortom’s choice as their party’s governorship flagbearer. But the duo of Jime and Waku later reconciled, when the Gen. Muhammad Buhari presidency intervened, by also settling Jime with a federal plum job, in the interest of the party. The whole legal tussle that was taken to court by Tarzoor seeking nullification of Ortom’s election ended in favour of the governor and the APC at the apex court – The Supreme Court (Babajide, 2019).

No sooner did the litigation ended than the effect of Sen. Akume’s alleged overbearing influence on Ortom’s governance of the state began to be felt in the manner in which the senator representing Benue North West was allegedly calling the shot while the governor seemingly acted as a puppet (Onunugoga, 2020). The senator allegedly dictated to Ortom in matters of appropriation of money, appointment into key ministries, bureaus, parastatals and boards. According to Wanu (2015, p.23) described the magnitude of the overbearing influence of the Akume (godfather) on Ortom (godson) thus:

Of the three appointees, Sen. Akume took two slots of SSG and Security Adviser that he allotted to his known cronies, Mr. Targema Tarkema and former Adviser on Security, Col. Edwin Jando (rtd) respectively, while Ortom produced the Chief of Staff, Terwase Orbunde. Similarly, during the appointment of Commissioners and Special Advisers, it became glaring that out of the 13 Commissioners, Akume nominated seven just as out of the 18 Special Advisers, nine were picked by the godfather. Known for his penchant for sectional politics, Akume ensured that all the three Local Governments within his Jemgbagh locality were well taken care of to a point that Tarka
where he hails from, produced a commissioner just as Gboko had the SSG and two Advisers while Buruku Local Government was allotted a Commissioner. Similarly, the commissioners from Kwande and Makurdi respectively were given to relations of Akume. Not minding protests that were staged across the state concerning the nominees, Ortom stated during a retreat in Makurdi that the appointees were carefully selected out of many that are willing to serve the State in these capacities, adding that due consultations at all levels of stakeholders particularly our party caucuses at various levels across the state with confirmation by the House of Assembly.

In what was perceived to be the beginning of a long drawn battle to wean his administration of the alleged godfather influence and control of Akume, the governor in a do or die fashion in July sacked almost all members of his cabinet in the first cabinet dissolution of his government. All the members of the cabinet affected by the dissolution were perceived loyalists of Akume. Floated by the unchallenged sacking of the “Akume loyalists”, the next lieutenant of the senator to come under the axe of the governor was the Benue State Internal Revenue Service (BIRS) boss, Mimi Adzape-Orubibi and Richard Agwa. No reason was given by the governor for the sack but the public understood the action with mixed reactions. While some hailed the removal of the BIRS boss and the Akume loyalists, saying such action was long overdue on the part of the governor, others who berated Ortom for allowing his godfather call the shot for the better part of his four-year term, said his second term ambition informed his sudden wake up rather than the masses’ plight. They promise him loss of reelection on the ground of his inability to clear unpaid salaries, still (Lawal, 2018).

Ortom jacked up the onslaught against Akume and the APC by defecting to the People’s Democratic Party, PDP citing a red card given to him in the party implying that the leader of the APC did not want him for a second term under its fold (Kabir, 2019). He also described the party as having slid to a one-man-show. But Akume says what the APC demanded of the governor was good governance. The desperate efforts made by Akume to unseat Ortom as the Governor of the state during the 2019 elections did not yield the desired result as the Governor won the second term of four years (Babajide, 2019). The history of the politics of godfatherism in the state revealed the struggle for power and resources allocated to the state. In many cases, these struggles often results to electoral violence with its attendant consequence on progress and development.

**Godfatherism and the Challenges of Good Governance in Benue State**

Godfatherism poses great threat not only to good governance but also the socio-economic stability of democratic governance in the country at large and Benue State in particular. The enthronement of godfatherism in Nigeria and Benue in particular has eroded away the basic pillars of democracy such as; the sovereignty of the people, government based on the consent of the governed, guarantee of basic human rights, free and fair elections, and equality before the law, and due process of the law. The impacts of godfatherism on good governance in Benue State are discussed below:

**Subversion of Democracy:** Democracy involves effective participation of the citizenry in the political process. In a democracy, the governed do not only come out to exercise their voting rights, they also have the right to be voted for. Democracy has to do with the protection of the interests of all and should not only focus on the narrow interests of the privileged in the society. The matter becomes more serious when the intention of these powerful elites is to exploit the state.
Godfatherism in Nigerian politics is a contest between elitism and democracy (Albert, 2005). Elitism is a system in which the exercise of political control by a small number of persons is institutionalized in the structure of government and political activity. The characteristic of godfatherism in Nigerian politics basically seeks to manipulate state officials and institutions for his own interests. Conflicts occur only when their clients refuse to be manipulated. This kind of situation does not augur well for the development and growth of any democratic process. Democracy has to do with the protection of the interests of all and should not only focus on the narrow interests of the privileged in the society. The matter becomes more serious when the intention of these powerful elites is to exploit the state.

The above experience profoundly found expression in what is obtainable in Benue State. The Benue people are completely alienated in the governance process. Godfathers in Benue State like their counterpart in other states of the federation use have continued their influence to block the participation of others in politics. They are political gatekeepers: they dictate who participates in politics and under what conditions. Godfathers in Benue State hijack political parties and determines who wins the primary elections in political parties through acrimonies party primaries.

**Undermines Development:** Development in any society is determined by the nature and character of its elites (Akpa & Abughdyer, 2019). This implies that the level of underdevelopment in Benue state is not unconnected to the mentality and disposition of the elites. The structure of politics in the state today ensures a typical political godfather to manipulate state officials, institutions and resources to the detriment of the common man. Without manipulations, the godfathers will not be able to realize the money he spent in ensuring victory for the godson during the electioneering campaign. When the manipulation becomes too much, the godson often react and the end product of such reaction, more often than not is violent conflicts.

The activities of godfathers in Benue State has greatly undermines the development in the state in two different ways. First, in order to fulfill his side of the bargain, the godson keep allocating contracts to his godfather which are never executed. Secondly, the feud between godfathers and gods sons in Benue state often distracts and frustrates progress and development. This development is experience by all administrations since the inception of democracy in the state since 1999. For instance, during Suswam administration, the feud between the governor and his godfather distracted the second four years of the administration. The governor who appeared focused in his first tenure but his performance in his second tenure was not impressive due to the litany of cases against him. In all this, the massive cost of hiring and maintaining his elaborate defence council made of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) (Shija, 2010). No doubt, the legal fees were expensive. Whether these were an issue on his mind was highly distractive. This paper only imagines how these resources were allocated for the provision of essential services like potable water, electricity, education, health care, and roads among others. The consequences of this are deepening hostility, division and poverty in the state. This brand of politics is anti-democratic and neglects all the principles of good governance.

**Electoral Malpractice and Violence:** Godfatherism is one of the most important factors responsible for electoral malpractices in Nigeria. We should not be surprised about this fact given the assurance that godfathers give to their clients on winning elections when reaching agreements with them. The seriousness of the problem here is better appreciated when the fact is faced that there
are many godfathers contesting for recognition at every election. The relationship between the godfather and godfather is instrumental: the godfather assures the latter of electoral success and the godson uses his political power after winning the election to advance the social, economic and political influence of his mentor. This explains why elections in Nigeria are usually a contest of power between godfathers.

It is incontrovertible that an open secret in Nigeria that the godfathers recruit the teeming unemployed youths and arm them with arms and ammunitions in order to carry out violence during elections. This is because they see it as a zero-sum game in which the winner takes all syndrome. Thus, godfathers more often than not, recruit youths as foot soldiers and arm them with necessary logistics, which are also being used to perpetuate kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery, human trafficking, and drug abuse in many villages, towns and cities in the state. During electioneering period almost all leading politicians in Benue state have at least one youth militia group. For example, there were the “Bai boys,” and every prominent politician has this type of youth boys group in their respective camps. Some were engaged in these actions because of poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and frustration. There are still youth militia groups such as the “Ghana group” in Sankera, the “Aondonengen and Saasaa groups” in Gboko, the “Sparko G group” in Makurdi among other groups spread sporadically in the state (Akuhwa, 2015).

The major implication is that such youths in Benue State today find it very difficult to realise that godfathers are destroying their destinies. The high rate of poverty that is affecting the populace has prevented many youths from accessing higher education, while those who could afford higher education are confronted with the menace of unemployment. Such youths therefore, become vulnerable to political godfathers manipulations. Instead of trying to struggle and develop their potentials, they find solace in some coins which they receive from godfathers. These youths also fail to realise that godfathers have their children abroad, schooling or working while they are risking their lives for them.

Political Corruption: Corruption is a common term at the local, national and international level. To Asogwa (2008), political corruption is a symptom of something gone wrong in the management of the state. Politically, corruption entails the extortion and misuse of public goods for the utilization of a few. In Nigeria, it is incontestable that corruption has assumed a ludicrous dimension. The Nigerian situation aptly fits into what Myrdal described in Amuwo (2005), as the “folklore of corruption”. To Ogundiya (2010, p.235), the consequences of political corruption are patently manifested in “cyclical crisis of legitimacy, fragile party structure, institutional decay, chronic economic problem and underdevelopment and above all, general democratic volatility”. Godfatherism has undoubtedly fuelled corruption epidemic in the state as politicians use every means available to them, legal or illegal to win political positions.

In Benue state, incidences of corruption abound. The growing phenomenon of godfatherism has made it difficult for people to get anything in the state simply through hard work. Mediocrity and hypocrisy are acceptable philosophy of governance in the state. All these negate the principles of accountability, contestability, transparency and inclusiveness.

Conclusion

Godfatherism is a virus that infected the politics in the state and the country at large. It will continue to threaten the practice of popular political participation in the country’s democratic process. It has weakened good governance in the state through the instigation of political violence and electoral violence, political corruption, accountability and
inclusive in governance. In Benue state, godfatherism has also created envy, disharmony and disunity among Benue elites and the general people. This lack of harmony in leadership in Benue state has enthroned the act of petition writing and counter-petitions across the state. In sum, godfatherism has negative effects on political leadership and democracy because it is counterproductive since it does not impact positively on the socio-economic lives of the people. Instead of investing in socio-economic ventures that will attract development those monies are channel for judicial adjudications.

**Recommendations**

In the light of the effects of godfatherism on good governance in Benue State and the need to urgently address this growing phenomenon, the paper suggests the following measures:

i. The electoral laws in Nigeria should be reformed to limit the funding of political parties and their candidates by individuals and corporate organizations. This is the way forward in abrogating the phenomenon of godfatherism.

ii. The government should diversify the economy in order to create employment for youths, who carry out the evil biddings of godfathers and their godsons for mere peanut. Sustainable youth empowerment programmes should be implemented to take the teeming unemployed youths out of the streets.

iii. There is dare need to sensitize the citizens on the importance of participating in election and the citizens consciousness should be arouse on demanding proper accountability and stewardship from political leaders.

iv. The government should establish and strengthen sovereign institutions free from external control, to act as watchdog to public office holders. This will help to ensure transparency and accountability, and concomitantly minimize the abuse of power. For example, the activities of EFCC (Economic Financial Crimes Commission) and ICPC (Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Crime) should be stepped up in this regard.

**References**


