



 Research Article

UNVEILING THREATS TO DEMOCRACY: GODFATHERISM'S IMPACT ON NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper scrutinizes the detrimental effects of godfatherism on the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process. Godfatherism, a phenomenon where powerful individuals exert undue influence over political candidates and officeholders, has long plagued Nigeria's democratic journey. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary examples, this study sheds light on how godfatherism undermines electoral integrity, perpetuates corruption, and erodes democratic principles. Key manifestations of godfatherism include candidate imposition, vote-buying, electoral violence, and manipulation of party structures. Furthermore, the paper explores the broader implications of godfatherism on governance, accountability, and citizen participation. By uncovering the intricate dynamics of godfatherism in Nigeria, this study seeks to foster discourse and action towards safeguarding democratic institutions and promoting electoral transparency.

KEYWORDS

Godfatherism, Nigeria, electoral process, electoral integrity, democracy, corruption, political influence, electoral manipulation, governance, accountability.

INTRODUCTION

Educational Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and a prominent democracy on the continent, has faced persistent challenges in upholding the integrity of its electoral process. Among these challenges, the phenomenon of godfatherism looms large, casting a shadow over the principles of democratic governance and electoral transparency. Godfatherism, characterized by the undue influence exerted by powerful individuals over political candidates and officeholders, has become deeply entrenched in Nigeria's political landscape, posing a grave threat to the country's democratic aspirations.

This paper aims to delve into the intricacies of godfatherism and its profound impact on the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process. By examining historical precedents, contemporary manifestations, and the broader implications for governance and accountability, this study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of godfatherism and its corrosive effects on democratic principles.

The pervasiveness of godfatherism in Nigeria's political arena can be traced back to the country's transition to multiparty democracy in the 1990s.

As political parties emerged and vied for power, influential figures capitalized on their wealth, connections, and patronage networks to consolidate control over party structures and manipulate electoral outcomes. This pattern of godfatherism has persisted through successive election cycles, with powerful individuals wielding disproportionate influence over candidate selection, campaign financing, and policy decisions.

One of the most alarming manifestations of godfatherism is the imposition of candidates, where powerful godfathers dictate the selection of party nominees without regard for internal party processes or the will of the electorate. This practice undermines the democratic principles of political competition and citizen representation, perpetuating a system of cronyism and nepotism that stifles political innovation and marginalizes dissenting voices.

Moreover, godfatherism has been closely associated with electoral malpractices such as vote-buying, intimidation, and violence, which undermine the credibility of electoral outcomes and erode public trust in the democratic process.

By wielding their influence over electoral officials, security agencies, and party loyalists, godfathers manipulate the electoral playing field to ensure favorable outcomes for their preferred candidates, regardless of popular support or merit.

In addition to distorting electoral outcomes, godfatherism has far-reaching implications for governance and accountability in Nigeria. When elected officials owe their allegiance to godfathers rather than the electorate, they prioritize personal loyalty over public service, leading to a culture of impunity, corruption, and executive dominance. This erosion of democratic norms weakens institutions, undermines the rule of law, and perpetuates a cycle of political instability and social unrest.

In light of these challenges, it is imperative to confront the scourge of godfatherism and safeguard the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process. By promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, stakeholders can work together to dismantle the entrenched networks of patronage and foster a political environment that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian people. Through rigorous oversight, electoral reforms,

and civic education initiatives, Nigeria can chart a path towards a more inclusive, democratic future, free from the grip of godfatherism and its corrosive effects on electoral integrity.

METHOD

The research process undertaken to investigate the impact of godfatherism on Nigeria's electoral integrity involved a multifaceted approach aimed at comprehensively understanding the dynamics at play. Initially, a thorough review of existing literature, including academic studies, government reports, and media articles, provided foundational knowledge on the subject. This literature review helped identify key themes, historical context, and case studies pertinent to the phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigerian politics.

Following the literature review, primary data collection was conducted through interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, including politicians, civil society representatives, electoral officials, and members of the judiciary. These interviews were carefully structured to elicit insights into the prevalence, mechanisms, and consequences of godfatherism in Nigeria's

electoral process. Through open-ended questions and probing discussions, participants shared their perspectives, experiences, and observations, enriching the understanding of godfatherism's impact on electoral integrity.

Simultaneously, secondary data sources such as electoral reports, legal documents, and media coverage were analyzed to corroborate and contextualize the findings from the interviews. This triangulation of data sources helped validate emerging themes and identify patterns consistent with the literature and stakeholders' accounts. It also enabled a comprehensive exploration of the various facets of godfatherism, including its influence on candidate selection, electoral malpractices, governance, and accountability.

Data analysis was conducted iteratively, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis involved thematic coding of interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns related to godfatherism's impact on electoral integrity. Quantitative analysis, where applicable, involved the examination of electoral data to discern trends in voter turnout, election results, and reported irregularities, allowing for a more

nuanced understanding of the relationship between godfatherism and electoral outcomes.

Data Collection:

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of godfatherism on Nigeria's electoral integrity. Primary data sources included interviews with key stakeholders such as politicians, civil society representatives, electoral officials, and members of the judiciary. These interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides to elicit insights into the dynamics of godfatherism, its manifestations, and its consequences for electoral integrity.

In addition to interviews, the study relied on secondary data sources such as academic literature, government reports, media articles, and legal documents to provide context and background information on godfatherism in Nigeria. These sources were systematically reviewed to identify patterns, trends, and case studies illustrating the impact of godfatherism on electoral processes and outcomes.

Data Analysis:

Qualitative data from interviews and secondary sources were analyzed thematically using a

grounded theory approach. Themes and patterns related to the influence of godfatherism on candidate selection, electoral malpractices, governance, and accountability were identified through iterative coding and categorization. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis software to facilitate data organization and interpretation.

Quantitative data, where available, were analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine trends in electoral malpractices and their correlation with godfatherism. Electoral data such as voter turnout, election results, and reports of irregularities were collated and analyzed to assess the impact of godfatherism on electoral outcomes and public perceptions of electoral integrity.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting interviews, and confidentiality was maintained to protect the anonymity of respondents. Steps were taken to minimize potential biases in data collection and analysis,

including triangulation of data from multiple sources and reflexivity in interpreting findings.

Limitations:

Despite rigorous methodological approaches, the study faced several limitations. The qualitative nature of the research limited the generalizability of findings to broader contexts beyond the study sample. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data and retrospective accounts may have introduced biases and inaccuracies in the findings. Moreover, the study's focus on godfatherism as a primary determinant of electoral integrity may have overlooked other contextual factors influencing electoral processes in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the study's findings provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between godfatherism and electoral integrity in Nigeria, informing policy discussions and advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening democratic governance and accountability.

RESULTS

The examination of godfatherism's impact on Nigeria's electoral integrity reveals a complex

web of influence that undermines democratic principles and erodes public trust in the electoral process. Through a combination of historical analysis, stakeholder interviews, and data triangulation, several key findings emerge:

Influence Over Candidate Selection: Godfathers wield significant influence over the selection of political candidates, often imposing their preferred nominees on political parties through intimidation, financial coercion, or manipulation of party structures. This imposition undermines internal party democracy and limits the ability of grassroots candidates to compete on a level playing field.

Electoral Malpractices: Godfatherism facilitates a culture of electoral malpractices, including voter intimidation, ballot stuffing, vote-buying, and manipulation of election results. By exerting control over electoral officials, security agencies, and party loyalists, godfathers subvert the will of the electorate and compromise the integrity of electoral outcomes.

Governance and Accountability: Elected officials beholden to godfathers prioritize personal loyalty over public service, perpetuating a cycle of corruption, impunity, and executive dominance.

This erosion of democratic norms weakens institutions, undermines the rule of law, and hinders efforts to promote transparency, accountability, and good governance.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the pervasive influence of godfatherism on Nigeria's electoral process and its broader implications for democratic governance and accountability. The phenomenon of godfatherism represents a fundamental challenge to democratic principles, as it concentrates power in the hands of a few influential individuals at the expense of popular sovereignty and political pluralism.

Moreover, godfatherism perpetuates a culture of patronage and rent-seeking behavior, where access to political office becomes contingent upon allegiance to a powerful patron rather than merit or public service. This undermines meritocracy and fosters a sense of disillusionment among citizens, particularly youth and marginalized communities, who perceive electoral processes as rigged and unresponsive to their needs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, godfatherism poses a grave threat to Nigeria's democratic governance and electoral integrity, perpetuating a cycle of corruption, impunity, and political instability. Addressing the root causes of godfatherism requires concerted efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote transparency and accountability, and empower citizens to participate meaningfully in the political process.

Key strategies include enacting electoral reforms to enhance transparency and oversight, strengthening anti-corruption measures to curb illicit political financing, and promoting civic education and engagement to foster a culture of political accountability and citizen empowerment.

By unveiling the threats posed by godfatherism and advocating for reforms that promote electoral integrity and democratic governance, Nigeria can chart a path towards a more inclusive, transparent, and responsive political system that serves the interests of all its citizens.

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