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GODFATHER-DRIVEN CRISES AND INTERNAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES: A STUDY OF PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP) AND ALL PROGRESSIVES CONGRESS (APC)

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Abstract
This paper aimed to examine the phenomenon of godfatherism within Nigeria's two major political parties, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), and its impact on internal party democracy, as well as its implications for party stability and governance in the country. The paper assumed that godfatherism has become deeply rooted as a sub-political culture within Nigeria's party system. Data were collected through surveys and analysed using the framework of elite theory in politics. Simple Linear Regression, conducted with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) at a significance level of 0.05 was employed to test the hypothesis. The findings indicated that the influence of godfathers within Nigeria's political parties has had adverse effects on their internal democracy, leading to dwindling support from party loyalists who perceived the parties as unstable and lacking direction especially when controversies are left unresolved or poorly managed. Furthermore, internal party crises fuelled by godfather politics has led to frequent changes in party leadership and citizens' dissatisfaction which jeopardises their prospects of winning elections. Consequently, the study recommended that political parties curtail their reliance on party elites (godfathers) for funding to avoid being manipulated and prone to crises. Additionally, it suggested incorporating the principle of internal democracy into political parties' constitutions as well as proactive resolution of grievances by party leadership.

Keywords: Election, Godfatherism, Internal Democracy, Political Proteges, Political Parties.

Introduction

In contemporary democracies, political parties play a crucial role in educating the public about politics, as party politics has evolved into a defining feature and the foundational platform from which leaders emerge and political activities are operationalized. The culture of godfatherism has deeply permeated Nigeria's political landscape. This phenomenon became more pronounced in Nigerian political campaigns during the 1960s and the early post-independence period, as politicians assumed godfather roles (Ahmed and Ali, 2019). Bernard (2009) likened Nigeria's electoral politics to the godfatherism that prevailed in Chicago, Illinois, in the years leading up to World War II, where gang leaders funded

politicians' campaigns, manipulated election results to secure their victory, and then extracted assurances and deals from their political proteges. In this context, it is no misnomer to state that the politics of godfatherism has become ingrained in Nigeria's political landscape, enabling many contenders to realize their political aspirations.

Regrettably, Nigerians often lack the opportunity to vote based on party ideology; instead, they tend to vote for specific individuals. This is primarily due to the absence of clear party doctrines, leaving voters to focus on selecting their preferred candidates. For instance, during the tenure of the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG), the party leaned towards social democracy. Supporting AG meant advocating for free education if the party emerged victorious in the elections. However, parties prioritizing the welfare of the populace are now a rarity. The ongoing discord between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) serves as a stark reminder of the turbulent state of our nation's political landscape. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic, Nigerian political parties have witnessed a troubling dearth of innovative ideas. Party ideology has virtually vanished as Nigerian political actors, driven more by personal ambition than political philosophy, frequently switch affiliations in pursuit of their goals (Olanrewaju, 2015)

Stating the Problem

The values, character, behaviours, and attitudes exhibited by the elite members of Nigeria's primary political parties, the PDP and APC, from 2014 to 2023, tend to mirror the prevailing political culture of Nigerian society as a whole. This alignment is in line with Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952, pp.78-105) conceptualization of "culture" as encompassing historically developed life strategies - whether rational, irrational, or beyond logic - that serve as potential frameworks for human behaviour at any given moment. Notably, even smaller political entities now seek to garner public support by establishing patron-client relationships with these major parties.

A prominent aspect of Nigeria's political sub-culture is godfatherism, which has significantly influenced party structures. The actions of godfathers have led to a crisis of confidence among elected officials, fostering disillusionment with democratic governance and a growing sense of disenchantment with the government. There is also a rising frustration stemming from the perception that individual voters lack significance in the political process. Godfathers wield considerable power in determining candidates for office, influencing election outcomes, and securing appointments to positions of authority in Nigerian politics and governance. This behaviour has become deeply ingrained within party structures, permeating from the national to the grassroots level of the Nigerian political system. While widely recognized as a departure from accepted civil norms, this practice has become entrenched within the party structures of the two major political parties in Nigeria - the PDP and the APC - transcending from the national level down to the local political units.

Another troubling and concerning development in the realm of political godfatherism within Nigerian democracy is its influence on the judiciary, particularly concerning the selection of party representatives. Nowadays in Nigeria, party primaries are often determined in courtrooms rather than through fair competition (Dode and Ita, 2020). Additionally, this influential group has exacerbated the issue of vote-buying to the extent that it becomes challenging for the uninformed, especially in rural areas, to resist. In light of these observations, this study posits that Nigeria's prevailing political culture, as epitomized by the dominant PDP and APC, is characterized by godfatherism practiced by their elites, with significant ramifications for governance, politics, and society at large. Furthermore, this phenomenon tends to detrimentally affect the level of internal democracy within Nigeria's political parties during the electoral process.

Given this context, it became imperative to investigate the extent to which the conduct of godfatherism by the elites of PDP and APC has impeded or hindered internal democracy within the parties in Nigeria's electoral process, hence this study.

Conceptual Clarification

Godfather and Godfatherism

The concept of godfatherism encompasses various elements such as intermediation, mentorship, benevolence, support, and sponsorship. In the realm of politics, it embodies the idea that certain individuals hold considerable sway, enabling them to dictate the allocation of party tickets and influence electoral victories (Chukwuemeka, Oji, and Chukwurah, 2013; Ita and Edet, 2018). As per Ayoade (2006), godfathers wield significant influence within political parties, often dominating the nomination process due to their control over the party machinery. These influential figures are considered political giants within their constituencies, sought after by both parties and candidates alike for their ability to mobilize political support. Godfatherism, thus conceptualized, revolves around the belief that certain individuals possess the power to single-handedly determine party nominations and electoral outcomes.

Bassey and Enetak (2008) have elucidated a conceptualization of godfatherism that captures the influence and power wielded by politically significant individuals in shaping candidate selection for elections and influencing election outcomes. In their opinion, godfathers demonstrate significant political mobility and possess the ability to direct political support toward specific parties or candidates through their influential endorsements. Those involved in this practice are known as godfathers, while those who benefit from their support are referred to as godsons, highlighting the complex relationship between influential figures and their beneficiaries in the political sphere.

As described by Chukwuemeka *et al*. (2013), godfathers represent a coalition of powerful socio-economic and political elites bound by a common value system operating within a structured framework. These coalitions often feature godfathers who exert control over the collective entity, similar to a well-organized mafia. These influential figures, known for their formidable sway, dictate the who, what, when, and how of political and bureaucratic appointments. In contemporary Nigeria, many godfathers have adopted tactics reminiscent of the mafia, employing violent schemes, aggressive politicking, and manipulative strategies to further their interests. In this pursuit, they often adhere to Machiavelli's famous adage, 'the end justifies the means'.

Synthesizing the various perspectives outlined above, godfatherism can be understood as the facilitation of financial support for political parties by a select group of influential elite individuals who position themselves as powerful brokers and key decision-makers. This financial backing comes with reciprocal expectations, involving a form of indirect power manipulation and the pursuit of material benefits. Essentially, godfatherism resembles a substantial investment made with the anticipation of significant returns.

From these conceptualizations, it becomes clear that godfatherism involves a dynamic interaction between two central parties: the godfather and the godson. This relationship is inherently symbiotic, with each party dependent on the other for their survival and the achievement of their respective objectives. Importantly, effective collaboration is necessary for both parties to realize their goals. The godfather serves as the primary financial supporter of the godson's electoral campaign, investing considerable resources to ensure the godson's success. In return, the godson reciprocates by offering substantial interest payments and awarding lucrative contracts to the godfather, thus solidifying the mutually beneficial nature of this association (Albert, 2005; Adeoye, 2009; Majekodunmi and Olanrewaju, 2013).

Internal Party Democracy (IPD)

As conceived by Scarrow (2005), internal party democracy is a comprehensive concept encompassing various methods to involve party members in intra-party discussions and decision-making processes. The rationale behind this notion is that parties employing internally democratic procedures are more likely to select capable and appealing leaders and candidates, adopt responsive policies, and consequently achieve greater electoral success. Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011) view internal party democracy as the adherence to basic democratic principles within a party and the extent to which it subscribes to these universal tenets. They emphasize the importance of identifying the values or elements essential for ensuring internal party democracy.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2008) stresses the necessity of certain minimum standards for the democratic functioning of parties, particularly in terms of party behaviour and organization. These standards are crucial for fostering increased participation, openness, transparency, and institutionalization within party operations and political systems more broadly, ultimately leading to internal party democracy. Likoti (2005) asserts that internal party democracy involves prioritizing the collective interests of party members, the public, and the state. It entails establishing participatory party structures and organizations as fundamental platforms for exercising democratic leadership and values. They argue that political parties can significantly contribute to democratization efforts by embracing and institutionalizing internal democracy.

Mimpen (2007) contends that internal democratic procedures could potentially lead to party divisions and crises, posing risks to democratic stability, weakening the influence of a party's leadership and hindering its ability to fulfil electoral promises. Conversely, Matlosa and Sello (2005) submit that the absence of internal democracy and the effective functioning of political parties pose significant challenges across West African countries. This underscores the impact of insufficient internal party democracy as a significant threat to democratic consolidation in emerging democracies. It is important to note that democratic consolidation is unlikely in any political system where internal party democracy is lacking among political parties.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in the elite theory, as formulated by Italian Sociologist Gaetono Mosca (1858-1941). This theory posits that the political system is structured into two strata: the minority (the elite) that governs, and the majority (the masses) that are governed. In specific terms, Mosca (1939, p.45) held the opinion that:

> In all societies from societies that are very meagrely developed and have barely attained the dawning of civilization to the most advanced and powerful societies, two classes of people appear a class that rule and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes poor and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas, the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent, and suppliers the first with material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essential to the vitality of the political organisms.

The core premise of elite theory, as articulated by Mosca, is that the notion of democracy, with its emphasis on majority rule, is flawed because, in practice, a minority elite group governs the majority in any political system. More so, the elite is characterized by individuals who either directly wield political power or possess significant influence over its exercise.

Elite theory provides a pertinent framework for examining the actions of the political elite class, including godfathers, in the Nigerian context. It underscores the reality that a relatively small, cohesive elite group effectively governs the vast majority of society. This group not only makes decisions that impact the masses but also dictates the political discourse, shapes and determines the value and direction of governance, often in their own self-interest or personal whims, within the Nigerian political landscape.

This framework sheds light on certain traits exhibited by Nigerian politicians, particularly those who transited from high government positions or military backgrounds into politics. These individuals often leverage their party positions to intimidate others, maintaining their dominance despite being at the pinnacle of their professions and showing no signs of relinquishing power. Consequently, political parties in Nigeria no longer function as originally intended, with decision-making and resource allocation largely controlled by a select few. This situation has stunted the growth of the nation's democratic system.

In Nigeria, the influence of the elite is so profound that election outcomes are often predetermined, and any deviation from expectations is met with attempts to manipulate the results through economic and political means. This phenomenon has been prevalent in most elections held in Nigeria since 1999, at both the state and national levels. The implication is that the ruling class utilizes its influence to achieve its objectives or manipulate elections to gain political power, thereby prioritizing the interests of the wealthy over those of the general populace.

Emergence of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC)

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was established on August 19, 1998, by the G-34 committee, led by Dr Alex Ekwueme, the former Vice-President of Nigeria during the Second Republic. According to Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011), the PDP originated from three main sources. Firstly, it comprised politicians who had been denied registration by General Sanni Abacha during his self-succession project, later coalescing into the G.34 Men committee, which opposed Abacha's self-succession bid. The second source was politicians who neither opposed nor supported Abacha's self-succession but were not part of his political machinery, forming the All Nigeria Congress (ANC) under the leadership of Chief Sunday Awoniyi. The third source included followers of the late General Musa Yar'Adua under the Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM), including Chief Tony Anenih and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the former Vice-President of Nigeria (Aleyomi, 2013).

The party attracted a diverse membership, including traditional chiefs, academics, businessmen, and notably, retired senior military officers, with around 100 joining, including Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military leader of Nigeria (1976-1979). The PDP dominated Nigeria's political landscape for nearly 16 years, largely unchallenged, due to factors such as highly monetized politics, individualistic tendencies among politicians, lack of coherent party ideologies, and frequent party defections, among others (Adamu, 2012).

On February 6, 2013, the All Progressives Congress (APC) was formed through the merger of Nigeria's three largest opposition parties: The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The emergence of the APC was significant, as previous attempts to form a major opposition party in the country had failed (Egwemi, 2009; Egburonu, 2015).

The All Progressives Congress (APC) gained significant momentum when five incumbent governors from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), namely Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara State, Rabiu Kwankwaso of Kano State, Murtala Nyako of Adamawa State, and Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto State, defected to the newly established party. Additionally, 49 legislators joined the original 137 legislators in the APC, further bolstering its strength. This influx of members provided the APC with a distinct

advantage in the House of Representatives well before the 2015 general elections. On January 29, 2014, 11 senators, led by former Kwara State Governor, Bukola Saraki, also defected to the APC. Furthermore, prominent figures such as former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aminu Tambuwal and former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar joined the APC ranks (Egburonu, 2015).

Methodology

The study examined the conduct of party elites in the two major political parties (PDP and APC), focusing on how their actions have led to the erosion of internal democracies within the parties. The research utilized a survey method, with data collected through a structured questionnaire. The sample for the study was drawn from the 2,447,438 registered voters in Akwa Ibom State (INEC, 2022), irrespective of their party affiliations. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) population calculation procedure, resulting in a sample size of 384. The empirical evidences cited in this study were gathered from media reports, election analyses, scholarly articles, and personal observations.

Data Presentation and Analysis

After administering 384 copies of questionnaire, 377 copies were successfully retrieved and used for the purpose of testing, validating or otherwise of the hypothesis and analysis of this study.

Table 1: Responses on godfatherism

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Godfatherism breeds mediocrity and instability in the governance and public service.	178	141	42	16	377
2.	The prevalence of Godfatherism erodes political parties of internal democracy.	142	167	32	36	377
3.	Godfatherism robs electorates of legitimate leaders.	119	184	49	25	377
4.	Imposition of candidates on the people leads to the emergence of poor choice of leaders.	154	158	50	15	377

Key: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

As depicted on the table 1, for statement No. 1, the prevalence of godfatherism fosters incompetence and instability in government and public service, with 47.2% strongly agreeing, 37.4% agreeing, 11.1% disagreeing, and 4.2% strongly disagreeing. Regarding statement No. 2, responses indicated that 37.7% strongly agreed, 44.3% agreed, 8.5% disagreed, and 9.5% strongly disagreed that political parties' internal democracy is undermined by the dominance of godfatherism. Statement No. 3 findings revealed that godfatherism deprives electorates of genuine leaders, with 31.6% strongly agreeing, 48.8% agreeing, 13.0% disagreeing, and 6.6% strongly disagreeing. Finally, in response to statement No. 4, 40.8% of respondents strongly agreed, 41.9% agreed, 13.3% disagreed, and 4.0% strongly disagreed that imposing candidates on the populace leads to poor leadership choices.

Table 2: Responses on governance, internal democracy, political crises and political apathy

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total

5.	Law-making remains a top priority for law makers despite their decamping from one political platform to another in the national Assembly.	97	196	58	26	377
6.	The process of law making is always followed through irrespective of inter-party defections in the National Assembly.	7	25	126	219	377
7.	Internal democracy will be difficult to attain in the face of godfatherism.	237	115	12	13	377
8.	Internal party squabbles and crises are inevitable due to godfatherism.	119	184	49	25	377
9.	Political crisis is a major feature of intolerance of opposition party.	154	158	50	15	377
10.	Opposition parties hardly make significant contributions to governance due to political intolerance.	91	202	52	32	377
11.	The percentage of voters' apathy has continuously increased due to the activities of political thugs during elections.	146	91	41	93	377
12.	Majority of the masses have refused to carry out their electoral obligations for fear of being attacked by political thugs working for the political elites.	88	130	69	90	377

Key: SA: Strongly Agree; AG: Agree; DA: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree.
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

From the data provided on table 2, it can be observed that for statement No. 5, 25.7% strongly agreed, 52.0% agreed, 15.4% disagreed, and 6.9% strongly disagreed, indicating that Members of Parliament (MPs) still prioritize passing laws despite their shifting loyalties within the National Assembly. Despite instances of interparty defections in the National Assembly, responses to statement No. 6 revealed that 1.9% strongly agreed, 6.6% agreed, 33.4% disagreed, and 58.1% strongly disagreed with the notion that the legislative process is always carried out. Regarding statement No. 7, it was found that 62.9% strongly agreed, 30.5% agreed, 3.2% disagreed, and 3.4% strongly disagreed that achieving internal democracy will be challenging in the presence of godfatherism. As for statement No. 8, responses indicated that internal party disputes and crises are inevitable due to godfatherism, with 31.6% strongly agreeing, 48.8% agreeing, 13.0% disagreeing, and 6.6% strongly disagreeing. Statement No. 9 revealed that 40.8% strongly agreed, 41.9% agreed, 13.3% disagreed, and 4.0% strongly disagreed with the idea that political crises are a significant indicator of intolerance within opposition parties.

Concerning statement No. 10, it was found that 24.1% strongly agreed, 53.6% agreed, 13.8% disagreed, and 8.5% strongly disagreed that political intolerance hampers opposition parties from making meaningful contributions to governance. Responses to statement No. 11 indicated that 24.7% strongly disagreed, 10.9% disagreed, 25.7% agreed, and 38.7% strongly agreed that the actions of political thugs during elections contribute to increased voter indifference. Lastly, for statement No. 12, it was observed that 23.3% strongly agreed, 34.5% agreed, 18.3% disagreed, and 23.9% strongly disagreed with the assertion that fear of assault by political thugs employed by political elites has led the majority of the populace to refrain from fulfilling their electoral duties.

To either validate or invalidate the opinions of respondents on the influence of godfathers vis-à-vis internal parties' democracy, it became imperative to formulate and test the understated hypothesis

H_i: The nature and practice of godfatherism by PDP and APC elites has significantly affected the level of internal democracy of the political parties in Nigeria's electoral process.

H_o: The nature and practice of godfatherism by PDP and APC elites has not significantly affected the level of internal democracy of the political parties in Nigeria's electoral process.

Table 3: Regression analysis to determine the effect of godfatherism by PDP and APC elites on the degree of internal party democracy in Nigeria's electoral process

Groups	N	B	R	R Square	Df	t calculated	t critical	P value	Decision
Godfatherism					1				
	377	.079	0.125	0.019	375	2.480	1.96	.015	H_O: rejected
Internal democracy					376				

β = regression coefficient; Statistical Package for Social Science -SPSS - Ver. 20.0

The regression output on table 3 illustrates the impact of godfatherism, as demonstrated by leaders of the PDP and APC, on internal party democracy within Nigeria's electoral process. The coefficient of determination (r-square) indicates that the use of godfatherism by PDP and APC leaders explains only 1.9% of the overall variability in the level of internal party democracy in Nigeria's electoral process. The findings of the regression analysis revealed that the degree of internal democracy in Nigeria's political parties is significantly affected by the godfatherism practiced by PDP and APC elites ($\beta = 0.079$, t computed = 2.480, t tabulated = 1.96, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, the null hypothesis, suggesting that the godfatherism practices of PDP and APC elites have no significant influence on the level of internal party democracy in Nigeria's electoral process, was rejected. The results of the hypothesis aligned with the arguments put forth by Chukwuma (2008) and Ita (2018a), who contended that the politics of godfatherism has negatively affected Nigeria's political system and its citizens, given instances where godfathers dictate who will run for office or impose their chosen candidates on the populace against the choice of party.

Throughout Nigeria's Fourth Republic, parties' ability to present electorates with genuinely acceptable candidates through the process of internal party democracy has remained challenging during elections. Instances of candidate imposition have been more prevalent than proper nominations through primaries. Often, candidates who win primaries are replaced, leading to party factionalization and disputes that often end up in courts. Additionally, cases of parallel primaries resulting in the nomination of multiple candidates claiming the party's ticket are common. Moreover, aspirants who feel unfairly treated during party nomination processes frequently switch from major parties to relatively unknown ones to contest elections (Ikeanyibe, 2014).

Furthermore, the issue of godfatherism and internal party crises often persist after general elections. This is mostly exemplified by the post-2023 general elections conflict in Rivers State between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Minister of FCT Abuja (former governor of Rivers State), Nyesom Wike, prompting calls from concerned Nigerians for President Bola Tinubu's intervention due to its potential threat to democracy and national

security (Ukaibe, 2023). Despite extensive legal provisions regulating party organization and operations, including the mandatory use of IPD for nominating election candidates, these occurrences persist, posing significant challenges to effective party institutionalization and democratic stability.

Godfathers and the Crisis of Party Democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

Conflict is an inherent aspect of society, and it is not uncommon for conflicts to arise within party organizations, as they are inherently driven by diverse interests. Intra-party feuds have been a prevalent characteristic of partisan politics in Nigeria since 1999. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), being a large party with a heterogeneous membership, has experienced numerous conflicts due to its diverse membership base. According to observations by Chukwuma and Ali (2014), the PDP has grappled with a series of intra-party crises over the past sixteen years. Some notable instances of internal crisis within the party include the internal division in 2000, which resulted in two factions led by Chief Sunday Bolorunduro Awoniyi and Chief Ume Ezeoke respectively.

Other significant conflicts include the Anambra State internal tussle between former Governor Chris Ngige and his godfather, Chief Chris Uba; the crisis in Cross River State leading to the emergence of two factions; the Imo State crisis prompting Senator Ifeanyi Ararume's defection to the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and later back to PDP; the Ogun State crisis resulting in Senator Ibikunle Amosun's defection to ANPP and subsequently to ACN; the Ekiti State case leading to former Governor Segun Oni's defection to ACN and later to PDP; the crisis in Ondo State leading to Governor Segun Mimiko's defection to Labour Party, and later back to PDP; the crisis in Abia State PDP resulting in former Governor Orji Uzor Kalu's defection to the Progressive People's Alliance, and later back to PDP; and the Bayelsa State crisis leading to former Governor Timipre Sylva's defection to the All Progressives Congress (APC). Additionally, internal PDP crises prompted the defection of former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar to ACN in 2003, and former Senate President Late Chuba Okadigbo and Late Harry Marshall to ANPP.

Before the 2015 General Elections, the PDP found itself once again embroiled in internal party turmoil, culminating in a split on August 31, 2013, as certain members became discontented with the party's leadership. Among the grievances were: the escalating repression and arbitrary suspension of members exemplified by the suspension of Governor Rotimi Amaechi, the dissolution of the executives of the Adamawa State chapter, and repeated violations of the party's constitution and democratic principles under the chairmanship of Alhaji Bamanga Tukur (Chukwuma and Ali, 2014). Additionally, President Goodluck Jonathan's bid for re-election in 2015 exacerbated the crisis, with some members opposing his second term ambition while others claimed there was no party primaries for the PDP presidential candidate in the 2015 general elections, with President Goodluck Jonathan allegedly assumed as a consensus candidate based on a 'Yes' or 'No' ballot without any competitors (Odigwe, 2015).

These contentious issues persisted until August 31, 2013, when the party held a special convention, during which dissident members walked out of the venue and later formed their faction known as the 'New PDP.' The dissatisfied members included Engr Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, Governor of Kano State; Mr. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, Governor of Rivers State; Alhaji Abdulfatah Ahmed, Governor of Kwara State; Alhaji Murtala Nyako, former Governor of Adamawa State; Alhaji Aliyu Magatakarda Wamakko, Governor of Sokoto State; Alhaji Sule Lamido, Governor of Jigawa State; and Alhaji Babangida Aliyu, Governor of Niger State. They were led by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President; Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje, former acting national chairman of the party; and Chief Olagunsoye Oyinlola, former Governor of Osun State and the then secretary of the party. The failure of the party leadership to resolve the crisis had significant adverse consequences for

the party as demonstrated in the observation by International Crisis Group (2014, pp. 8-9) that:

> Following an 18 October, 2013 court order, which stopped the nPDP from establishing offices and barred the INEC from recognizing it as a political party, five of the seven dissident governors joined the APC. Those defections boosted the number of states controlled by the opposition to sixteen, leaving the PDP with eighteen. Furthermore, 49 House of Representatives members and eleven senators (all elected on the PDP platform) also defected, meaning, for the first time ever, that the opposition had assumed parity in the National Assembly.

The peak of the crisis was marked by the defection of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, to the APC in 2014 (Thurston, 2015). The persistent internal turmoil within the PDP and the subsequent defections of disgruntled members to the opposition party "is a culmination of the perennial subterranean wrangling in the party; which stemmed from desperate ambitions, lack of ideological attachment to party system, and crass partisan opportunism" (Chukwuma and Ali, 2014, p.56). This explains why between 1998 and 2017, the PDP changed its national chairman twelve (12) times. It has been led by Alex Ekweme, Solomon Lar, Barnabas Gemade, Audu Ogbeh, Ahmadu Ali, Vincent Ogbulafor, Okwesilieze Nwodo, Haliru Muhammed Bello (Acting National Chairman), Abubakar Kawu Baraje (Acting Chairman), Bamanga Mahmud Tukur, Adamu Mu'azu, and Ali Modu Sheriff, none of whom successfully completed his tenure (Ita and Bassey, 2017).

Leading up to the 2023 general elections, the party found itself again in godfather-driven internal leadership tussles resulting in two immediate past chairmen, Uche Secondus and Ayu, being disgraced out of office (Duru, 2023). Uche Secondus, who was initially supported by Wike, fell out of favour leading to his suspension by his ward, Ward 5 in Andoni Local Government of Rivers State, and his eventual removal from office on October 31, 2021 (Sunday, 2023). Similarly, Iyorchia Ayu's conflict with his governor, Samuel Ortom, Nyesom Wike, other governors, and the leaders of the PDP, resulted in his suspension by his ward. Following a vote of no confidence passed on him by the Igyorov ward executive in Gboko Local Government Area in Benue State, the party at the ward level suspended Ayu for anti-party activities. However, his attempt to challenge his removal as the National Chairman of the PDP proved abortive (Duru, 2023). Additionally, the G5 governors accused Ayu of biting the hand that fed him and engaging in anti-party activities. In particular, Wike maintained that while Ayu was busy suspending members of the party for anti-party activities, he himself was guilty of the act.

The internal crisis within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) stemmed from the outcome of the presidential primaries, which saw Atiku Abubakar emerged as the party's candidate for the 2023 general elections. The 'Ayu must resign' faction based their demands on Ayu's alleged pre-primaries promise to step down if a Northern candidate won, a promise he failed to honour after Atiku Abubakar, a northerner, emerged victorious with 371 votes, closely followed by Nyesom Wike, a southerner, with 237 votes. This led to a rift, with Wike and four other governors - Okezie Ikpeazu of Abia State, Seyi Makinde of Oyo State, Samuel Ortom of Benue State, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu State - and prominent party leaders, insisting on Ayu's resignation as the party's chairman to allow for a southerner to take the position for the sake of justice, equity, and fairness within the party (Oise-Oghaede, 2022).

Meanwhile, Wike refused to support Atiku's during the general elections and instead backed Tinubu, who was declared the winner by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) while continuing to demand Ayu's resignation even after the elections, contributing to the PDP's struggle to maintain unity as a party since the conclusion of the presidential primary. Following the elections, the Ayu-led National Working Committee

(NWC) of the party moved to suspend former Ekiti State governor, Ayodele Fayose, former Senate President, Ayim Pius Ayim, Prof. Dennis Ityavyar, and Aslam Aliyu, and referred Governor Samuel Ortom to the party's National Disciplinary Committee over alleged anti-party activities. Additionally, the party suspended former Enugu State governor, Chimaroke Nnamani, for openly supporting APC presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu. These developments highlight the PDP's internal democratic deficiencies and align with Ofoeze's (2001) declaration that the PDP is essentially a collection of disparate individuals and factions with no consensus on key socio-economic and political issues, united only by their desire to capture and retain state power indefinitely. Efforts to resolve the crisis, including the resignation of the Board of Trustees (BoT) chairman, Walid Jibrin, were rejected by the G5 governors led by Nyesom Wike.

Godfathers and the Crisis of Party Democracy in the All Progressives Congress (APC)

The APC also grapples with significant internal challenges, including factionalization and internal strife. Born out of the merger of four political parties, known as the 'legacy parties,' the APC was inherently a coalition of disparate elements, making its cohesion a daunting task. Notably, a provision in the APC's constitution granting governors leadership roles in their respective states exacerbated internal tensions. This provision favoured governors from the PDP, side-lining other politicians who had contributed significantly to the party's growth. This disparity led to the departure of disgruntled members, such as former Kano State Governor, Ibrahim Shekarau, and former Sokoto State Governor, Attahiru Bafarawa, who defected to the PDP along with their supporters (International Crisis Group, 2014).

Moreover, allegations of dictatorial tendencies among party leaders surfaced, with accusations of attempts to handpick candidates under the guise of "consensus candidates" instead of allowing democratic emergence through party primaries. In several states, politicians from smaller parties within the merger voiced grievances of marginalization, demanding fair representation in the APC's candidate selection process regardless of their political stature. The issue of candidate selection further exacerbated internal strife, as evidenced by conflicts like the Ondo APC gubernatorial primary of 2015, where the party's chairman, John Oyegun, clashed with the party's national leader, Senator Bola Tinubu, over the alleged imposition of a preferred candidate, Rotimi Akeredolu. Similarly, the Bayelsa state APC gubernatorial primary election in September 2015 saw former Edo State Governor, Adams Oshiomhole, who chaired the electoral process, accusing Timipre Sylva of employing thugs to disrupt the election and manipulating the results, falsely declaring himself the winner. The chaotic primaries, marred by irregularities and allegations of violence, led to the cancellation of results, highlighting the internal challenges plaguing the APC (Odigwe, 2015; Ita, 2022).

Furthermore, the absence of party discipline and internal democracy within the APC became evident when Dr Bukola Saraki and Hon. Yakubu Dogara defied the party's directives by assuming the positions of Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives, respectively. These instances underscore the prevailing nature of decision-making in Nigeria, which often reflects the interests of the petty bourgeoisie, elites, and guardian class rather than those of the populace or electorate. In Nigeria, holding government positions is synonymous with accessing wealth and power. Besides, securing candidacy or nomination within the APC has become one of the most expedient and lucrative routes to acquiring state power and accumulating wealth for personal gain. The practice of imposing candidates instead of allowing for democratic selection through popular vote, coupled with internal conflicts among party members and a lack of discipline, has fuelled tensions and led to a breakdown of internal party democracy, prompting defections and the formation of new political entities.

It is evident from the aforementioned issues that the actions of godfathers and political elites have significantly contributed to the erosion of internal party democracy in Nigeria. This was aptly summed-up by International Crisis Group (2014, pp. 11-12):

> In both PDP and APC States, tensions have been aggravated by the dearth of internal democracy. This is particularly a problem in the nineteen states where governors are completing their second, and final, four-year terms. Attempts by them to handpick their successors, instead of allowing state party members to nominate the candidate, and differences between the governors and national party leaders over the choice of the successors, have created multiple sources of friction. As most of these departing governors are also seeking election to the Senate, a 'retirement home' for former governors, their schemes to shut out all other senatorial aspirants from their constituencies are adding to local tensions. In most states, the situation is further complicated by sectional agitation that the gubernatorial ticket must be rotated between all major zones of the state, with various constituencies simultaneously claiming they had been "marginalised" over the years and insisting on their "right to produce" the next governor.

Consequences of Godfatherism for Party Stability and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Throughout Nigeria's history, spanning both military regimes and the Fourth Republic (1999-2023), the rise of godfatherism has posed a significant threat not only to effective governance but also to the overall socio-economic development and stability of democratic governance in the country. This influence has had dire consequences for the integrity of a truly free, fair, and credible electoral process, where citizens should rightfully elect their chosen representatives to public offices. Unfortunately, one of the most alarming outcomes of godfatherism in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been its ability to undermine the authenticity of elections by imposing favoured candidates onto the populace. This practice blatantly disregards the fundamental principles of democratic governance (Chukwuemeka, 2012; Ita and Bassey, 2017).

It is undeniable that godfather politics within political parties has led to frequent changes in party leadership, which has adversely affected their prospects of winning elections. For instance, Ayantoye (2022) has characterized the situation within the PDP as disastrous; emphasizing that heading into the general elections divided severely impaired its chances of success in the 2023 polls. He emphasized that the suspension and expulsion of members within the party had created internal crises that crippled its electoral prospects. Such internal divisions not only violate democratic norms but also prove politically disastrous for a party seeking to contest an election as a unified force.

Furthermore, internal party crises fuelled by godfather politics often lead to a loss of support from party loyalists who perceived the party as unstable and lacking direction especially when controversies are left unresolved or poorly managed. Persistent crises within parties can tarnish their reputation and result in negative media coverage, portraying them as lacking discipline and effective leadership (Ufuoma, 2023). Moreover, these crises can hinder the parties' ability to attract new members and supporters and divert their focus away from addressing various election petitions.

When public officials are no longer accountable to the citizens, who essentially had no input in their selection for public offices due to the dominance of godfathers, their allegiance tends to shift towards these influential figures. This distortion fundamentally undermines a crucial aspect of governance and democracy: the establishment of a responsive and transparent government. Such a situation also undermines the pillars of good governance

and political stability, which rely on principles like the rule of law, due process, accountability, and transparency in public administration (Ita, 2018b).

The proliferation of godfather phenomenon has deprived citizens of the benefits that democratic governance should provide, as the government becomes less inclined to initiate and implement policies that would improve the welfare of the general populace. This is because godfatherism in Nigeria often takes on a predatory nature, with political participation driven by the pursuit of personal wealth from government resources controlled by their godsons (Chukwuemeka, 2012). As a result, the limited financial resources allocated to the state from the national treasury, which ideally should be utilized to improve the living standards of citizens, become the primary focus of these godfathers. Instances where godsons, such as governors and chairpersons, fail to fulfil pre-election agreements with their godfathers, leading to conflicts include the situations in Abakaliki Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, between former chairman Hon. Emma Uguru and Hon. Mathew Uguru (incumbent) from 2007 to 2011; Senator Rashidi Ladoja of Oyo State and Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu between 2003 and 2007; Alhaji Olusola Saraki and Retd Navy Commodore Mohammed Lawal between 2003 and 2007; and Chief Chris Uba and Dr Chris Ngige between 2003 and 2006. These instances of godfatherism have resulted in significant and widespread consequences, including disruptions in economic activities, particularly in sectors like education, healthcare, security (due to political conflicts), agriculture, housing, and infrastructural development.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis, it is evident that internal party democracy remains an elusive concept in Nigerian politics, as powerful individuals consistently seize control of political parties at all levels, imposing loyalists or sycophants as candidates for election. This lack of internal democracy stands as a significant obstacle to Nigeria's democratic progress, constituting a flagrant violation of democratic principles. The imposition of candidates upon political parties, disregarding the preferences of delegates and the electorate, undermines the essence of democracy, which hinges on choice and the expression of the people's will. The internal strife within many political parties primarily stems from this deficiency in internal democracy within their organizational framework.

Throughout Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-present), the challenge of political parties offering electorates genuinely acceptable candidates through internal democratic processes has persistently plagued the electoral landscape. Instances of candidate imposition far outnumber those of proper nomination through primaries, often resulting in the replacement of duly elected candidates. While internal democracy is a vital component for the healthy growth of party systems, its observance, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, tends to fuel intra-party conflicts, leading to the defection of members to other parties at will. Moreover, the lack of transparency in party primaries further exacerbates the erosion of internal democracy within the Nigerian party system. In summary, godfatherism has entrenched itself as a social malaise in Nigerian politics, exerting a corrosive influence throughout the political landscape, undermining the very foundations of democratic governance.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings herein, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the impact of elite-driven crises that undermine internal democracy in Nigerian political parties:

- ✓ **Diversifying Funding Sources:** Political parties should strive to diversify their funding sources to reduce reliance on a few elite donors, the godfathers. Relying solely on these individuals for financial support can create a power dynamic that undermines the party's

autonomy and internal democracy. By seeking contributions from a broader base of supporters, parties can reduce the influence of any single donor and ensure greater financial independence.

- ✓ **Institutionalizing Democratic Principles**: Embedding democratic principles and equitable opportunities for all members within the party's constitution is essential. This entails enshrining provisions that guarantee transparency, inclusivity, and fairness in the party's decision-making processes. By institutionalizing these values, parties can create a framework that promotes internal democracy and fosters a culture of openness and participation among members.
- ✓ **Proactive Conflict Resolution:** Party leadership must adopt a proactive approach to addressing internal conflicts and grievances. This involves establishing mechanisms for timely conflict resolution, such as mediation and arbitration processes, to prevent disputes from escalating. Additionally, leaders should actively listen to the concerns of all stakeholders and work collaboratively to find mutually acceptable solutions. By addressing issues promptly and transparently, parties can maintain cohesion and preserve internal democracy.
- ✓ **Transparent Candidate Selection:** Political parties should uphold democratic practices in the selection of candidates for elective positions. This means adhering to transparent and inclusive nomination processes that allow for broad participation and representation. Parties should refrain from imposing candidates or engaging in favouritism, as this can breed resentment and undermine internal cohesion. Instead, they should prioritize meritocracy and ensure that candidates are selected based on their qualifications, integrity, and commitment to the party's ideals.
- ✓ **Enforcement of Party Discipline:** Maintaining discipline within party ranks is essential for upholding internal democracy and promoting accountability. Leaders must enforce party rules and regulations consistently, holding members accountable for their actions and decisions. This may involve imposing sanctions on individuals who violate party norms or engage in misconduct, regardless of their status or influence within the party. By upholding discipline, parties can foster a culture of respect for party institutions and collective responsibility among members.
- ✓ **Accessibility of Political Participation:** To enhance political participation and reduce the influence of godfathers, political parties should make the process of contesting elections more accessible to ordinary citizens. This includes lowering the cost of intent declaration and nomination/contesting forms to ensure affordability for aspiring candidates from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, political parties should actively encourage and support grassroots mobilization efforts to empower community-based leaders and activists to participate in the political process. By removing barriers to entry and promoting inclusivity, parties can strengthen internal democracy and promote greater representation of the people's interests in governance.

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