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# GODFATHERISM, DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION, AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN PLATEAU STATE: INTERROGATING THE ROLES OF INCUMBENT GOVERNORS (1999–2025)

**Ponmak Kenneth Zingdul**
Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja
ponmak.zingdul@fulokoja.edu.ng

**Semshak Danladi Kassem, Ph.D**
Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja
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**Abstract**

*Political godfatherism is one of the most entrenched obstacles to democratic consolidation and equitable development in Nigeria. This paper interrogates the role of incumbent governors in Plateau State between 1999 and 2025, focusing on how their dominance has shaped democratic outcomes and rural development trajectories. Anchored in elite theory, the study employed a qualitative research design, drawing on ten purposively selected Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and documentary sources. This approach provided rich, context-specific insights into the dynamics of patronage politics and elite capture. Findings reveal that incumbent governors function as de facto godfathers, exerting overwhelming influence over local government autonomy, electoral processes, and rural project allocation. Such practices undermine participatory democracy, entrench patronage networks, and distort rural development by prioritising loyalty over community needs. The study concludes that governance in Plateau State reflects elite dominance rather than institutionalised democracy, with rural communities bearing the brunt of exclusion. It recommends reforms to guarantee local government autonomy, transfer electoral oversight to INEC, establish a rural development agency, and adopt community-based approaches to ensure inclusiveness and sustainability. These measures are critical for insulating grassroots governance from elite manipulation and advancing democratic consolidation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Godfatherism, Democratic Consolidation, Rural Development, Elite Theory.*

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's return to democratic governance on 29 May 1999 was of major significance in the political evolution of the country. After a prolonged period of military dictatorship, the transition to civilian rule was welcomed with widespread expectations of rapid development and good governance. It was envisaged that a people's elected government would prioritise the delivery of improved living standards, particularly for the rural populace that had endured a considerably lengthy period of marginalisation (Shut, 2014). This is because, in an ideal democracy, governance is expected to be participatory and, at the same time, build institutions that promote equitable resource distribution, accountability, and the enhancement of the general welfare of every citizen without discrimination. Conversely, the Nigerian experience offers a divergent account of the actual ideals of democratic governance. In almost every state in Nigeria, including Plateau State, democracy is a shadow of itself, as democratic governance since 1999 has been evidently characterised by political patronage and elite capture (Albert, 2005; Omotola, 2007; Omonijo et al., 2013; Ojo et al., 2025;

Abdullahi, 2026). Democratic tenets have been consistently compromised to satisfy patronage interests and elite-centric politics.

In the Nigerian system, democratic outcomes are largely determined by a few influential and well-connected individuals at the expense of the majority. According to Omotola (2007), this situation enables the dominance of political godfathers to decide electoral and governance-related outcomes and dictate public policies without regard for popular participation. This kind of democratic circumvention has led to the entrenchment of narrow interests in governance and the sustenance of 'Big Man Rule' at the expense of the broader interests of the citizenry (Harris et al., 2023). Regardless of over two decades of unbroken civilian rule, democratic consolidation in Nigeria remains a mirage. Processes that should promote participatory and accountable governance are consistently distorted by the antics of patronage networks and godfatherism (Omotola, 2007; Ojo et al., 2025; Abdullahi, 2026). This condition has indeed compromised democratic consolidation and genuine political development, especially rural development.

Scholars have consistently acknowledged that political happenings in the Nigerian Fourth Republic are preoccupied with prebendalism. In this situation, powerful individuals popularly regarded as political godfathers sponsor and support candidates in electoral contests on condition that the protégés, known as godsons, reciprocate the gesture in kind or in cash (Albert, 2005; Omotola, 2007; Adeoye, 2009; Efobi, 2014; Adetula, 2015). This exchange of political value is premised on unflinching loyalty and access to political and economic control, which is usually done at the expense of the collective good. Kolawole (2004) argued that godfatherism in its ideal form is not inherently negative but is a democratic practice that signifies legitimate mentorship and guidance, as reflected in the biblical accounts of Moses and Aaron. On the contrary, the Nigerian version of political godfatherism presents a situation driven by parochial interests rather than popular welfare. Oghuvbu (2026) corroborates that the Nigerian character of political godfatherism is prominently associated with greed, selfishness, and wanton corruption facilitated by elite capture. The resultant effect is political underdevelopment and the erosion of democratic principles, particularly in the rural areas where the populace is more vulnerable to patronage-driven governance due to the inadequacies prevalent in the rural domain.

Thus, this study is motivated by three main concerns. First, despite the obvious and persistent incidence of political godfatherism and rural underdevelopment in Plateau State, there is no known empirical study that has employed the elite theory framework to analytically interrogate the roles of incumbent governors in the dynamics of democratic consolidation and rural development. Second, most of the literature reviewed has largely attributed the menace of political godfatherism to external factors, thereby ignoring the roles of state governors in entrenching and sustaining the phenomenon at the sub-national level. This is because incumbent governors are often seen as victims of godfatherism, thereby overlooking their own role in deploying state resources to perpetuate elite mediation in governance. Third, the spatial distribution of rural projects and infrastructure across rural communities precipitates inequality and, as such, demands attention to adequately address actual community needs and enhance participatory democracy.

Therefore, this study sets out to interrogate the roles of incumbent governors in the entrenchment of godfatherism and its consequences for democratic consolidation and rural development outcomes in Plateau State. Two specific objectives guide the inquiry: (i) to determine the role of incumbent governors as godfathers in Plateau State; (ii) to assess the effects of godfatherism on democratic consolidation, rural project distribution, and infrastructure allocation.

### 1.2 Conceptual Clarification: Political Godfatherism

Godfatherism is a common term in Nigerian politics. It denotes a pattern of politics anchored in the entrenchment of elitist interests rather than popular participation. Its definition in the Nigerian context has attracted divergent scholarly opinions due to various contestations of its origin and purpose. According to Albert (2005), the evolution of godfatherism in Nigerian politics can be traced to the pre-independence era; he argued that at that time, godfather–godson relationships in politics were based on trust and the mutual intention to pursue broader societal interests. However, the godfather–godson relationship in Nigerian politics has over the years been fundamentally altered to serve the interests of dominant political actors without recourse to popular views. Oghuvbu (2026) asserts that the contemporary manifestation of political godfatherism, particularly in the Nigerian Fourth Republic, is predominantly characterised by elite capture, corruption, exploitation, subjugation of popular will, and the consolidation of the narrow ambitions of powerful political actors.

From the foregoing, godfatherism in this context denotes a form of political patronage in which a patron–client arrangement is entered into between a powerful political actor referred to as the godfather and a protégé known as the godson. The godfather is expected to provide the necessary resources, connections, and influence required to access public office (either elective or appointive). In exchange, the godson is expected to reciprocate through absolute loyalty, sharing of proceeds accrued from the office, and, above all, advancing and sustaining the godfather's political and economic interests. In the event of any default on these expected commitments, political instability and conflict are likely to ensue (Albert, 2005; Omotola, 2007). It has been observed that this scenario perpetuates across Nigeria, including Plateau State, where godfathers support candidates for public office in expectation of returns, either in material or moral terms.

### Rural Development

The word 'rural' is often ascribed to a place largely characterised by persistent poverty, poor sanitary conditions, lack of portable drinking water, inadequate health facilities, dilapidated living structures, absence of electricity, poor road networks, and many other livelihood inadequacies. This implies that it is a direct opposite of urban. The life constraints mentioned as features of rural areas are mostly absent in urban areas, thereby making the latter more developed. Hence, rural development means the provision of basic infrastructure that facilitates quality living. It includes the construction of rural roads to facilitate the easy movement of goods and services, the provision of portable water, schools, healthcare facilities, and agricultural facilities that support rural productivity. According to Madu (2007), rural development is a way of assisting rural dwellers to achieve a fulfilled livelihood and quality living through responsive governance. Therefore, rural development is a mandate that can only be achieved through people-oriented leadership that prioritises the welfare of the people rather than through the imposition of ideas and the circumvention of popular will.

### 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the implications of political godfatherism on Nigerian democracy and political development are well represented in political science scholarship. Ameh and Dubu (2025) examined how godfatherism entrenched a culture of impunity among political leaders of the Taraba-North Senatorial District using elite theory and quantitative methods to collate data. The results signify a rise in impunity due to the influence of political godfathers. However, their methodology is limited in that qualitative data alone is inadequate to capture the real-life experiences of individuals. Besides, the study did not explore the implication of godfatherism on rural development outcomes, particularly in Plateau State.

Albert (2005) examined the genesis and evolution of godfatherism in Nigeria and established that while the phenomenon predates independence, its current form has been stripped of its original moral content of communal and mutual benefit; instead, it reinforces rent-seeking and elite capture politics and consolidates narrow interests. While Albert's analysis is apt, it did not interrogate the ills of the godfather–godson relationship on democratic consolidation and rural development outcomes specifically in Plateau State, where a larger proportion of the citizenry are rural dwellers, making it impossible to unravel the obvious patronage-related reasons that perpetuate underdevelopment and the chain of inadequacies bound in the rural areas.

Omotola (2007) interrogated the implications of godfatherism on the 2007 general elections. He found that the phenomenon undermined democratic processes, promoted mediocrity in governance, and as such retarded democratic values by prioritising loyalty over competence in the selection of public officials. This has been consistently upheld by other scholars since the return to civilian rule in 1999 (Albert, 2005; Omonijo, 2013; Ojo et al., 2025). Again, these studies revealed that the multifaceted roles of godfatherism in Nigeria constrain electoral competitiveness, negate civic culture, promote inequality, and entrench elite capture in governance. The authors advocated for enhanced civic engagement, electoral reform, and the institutionalisation of internal party democracy as the bedrock of ensuring democratic consolidation and sustainable development. However, none of the reviewed studies focused specifically on the implication of the phenomenon on rural development outcomes in Plateau State, hence making our analysis necessary to provide empirical evidence on the impacts of godfatherism on democratic consolidation and rural development outcomes.

Similarly, Ojo et al. (2025) examined the effects of political godfatherism on the electoral process in Southern Nigeria. The study revealed that the corrosive effects of godfatherism in the region weaken the performance of state institutions (including electoral bodies) and participatory democracy. The efficacy of the electoral umpire is the bedrock of every functional democracy; thus, its credibility is crucial in achieving democratic consolidation and development. Yet, the study did not interrogate the implication of political patronage on the socio-economic development and political inclusiveness of the rural population. This paper will, therefore, enrich the literature by providing insights on the impacts of godfather–godson politics on democratic and development outcomes, and will also advance recommendations that will insulate the electoral system from the manipulative antics of godfatherism in order to improve democratic delivery in Plateau State and Nigeria as a whole.

Oghuvbu (2026) examined the effects of godfatherism on Nigeria's democracy through the lens of elite theory. He found that political godfatherism is directly responsible for the institutional weakness currently being experienced in Nigeria, including the systematic denial of citizens' genuine electoral choices. Though his theoretical framework is relevant to the interrogation of patron–client-related analysis, he did not interrogate how godfatherism impacts development outcomes such as rural project and infrastructure allocation. This study will therefore fill the existing gap by offering empirical evidence on the menace of godfatherism for rural development outcomes in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on Plateau State.

Okunoye and Gideon (2025) adopt a theological-ethical framework, contrasting the exploitative and partisan character of contemporary Nigerian godfatherism against biblical standards of just, accountable, and selfless leadership. This study agrees with their views on the basis that godfatherism in contemporary Nigeria is preoccupied with exploitative tendencies and self-serving ruling elites, which have in many ways obstructed development

and popular governance. We observed, however, that their interrogation does not cover the roles of incumbent governors in the entrenchment of the menace and the implications of the phenomenon on grassroots development. Moreover, their analysis was not about the dynamics of godfather-godson relationship in Plateau State.

Abdullahi (2026), in his study 'Godfatherism, Governance and Political Development in Nigeria', revealed that godfatherism is responsible for governance failure and political underdevelopment in Nigeria. He emphasised the systemic dimensions of the phenomenon as a bane to democratic consolidation and purposeful leadership. The study concludes that the godfather-godson relationship is tantamount to the persistent trends of poor development in Nigeria. Despite the contributions of this study, it did not evaluate the implication of godfatherism on rural development outcomes in Plateau State.

Notwithstanding these useful contributions, a significant gap exists in the literature. Most of the empirical evidence offered by existing studies has focused on the analysis of godfatherism at a broader or national level, or in other contexts such as Southern Nigeria and the Taraba-North Senatorial District, thereby leaving out the specific dynamics of the phenomenon in Plateau State. The reviewed literature particularly failed to interrogate the roles of state governors as godfathers and the consequences for democratic consolidation and rural development outcomes as unravelled by the primary empirical evidence herein. Thus, this study is relevant and timely, as it will directly fill the identified gap and provide empirical evidence on the implications of godfatherism for democratic consolidation and rural development outcomes in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts elite theory as its framework of analysis. Elite theory, as propounded by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels in the late nineteenth century, posits that every society is governed by a minority of powerful individuals who make decisions on behalf of the majority. These elites are primarily motivated by the preservation and reproduction of their own interests and seek to perpetuate their dominance through the recycling of power within a closed circuit of privileged actors (Pareto, 1935; Mosca, 1939; Michels, 1962). Elites are found in every critical sector of society and are usually at the top echelon, which makes them very influential and powerful.

Elite theory is particularly appropriate for the analysis of political godfatherism in Nigeria due to its core proposition that a few influential and powerful persons in society control power and decide the fate of the majority. It has been observed that in the Nigerian context, the core of political power is mostly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who manipulate state institutions and resources to satisfy their narrow interests rather than serving the common good of the citizenry. In Nigeria, godfathers and their protégés treat the political sphere as their private enterprise, prioritising self-gain and personal interest over the collective welfare of the larger society. Therefore, elite theory serves as a suitable framework that provides a coherent analytical lens through which the structural dimensions of godfatherism in Plateau State can best be understood. The institutional underpinnings of the theory support patronage networks and have drastic consequences on democratic consolidation and rural development, which can thus be systematically examined.

## 3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design to capture the complex realities of political godfatherism and its implications for democratic consolidation and rural development in Plateau State. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation is deeply embedded in social structures, elite networks, and lived community experiences; therefore, it requires the interrogation of the perceptions

and life experiences of relevant stakeholders so as to gain a proper perspective. By privileging narratives and perceptions, qualitative inquiry allows for a nuanced understanding of how incumbent governors exercise dominance and how such practices shape democratic values, governance, and rural development outcomes.

Primary data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), complemented by secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and media reports. A total of ten KIIs were conducted, purposively selected to ensure diversity and relevance. Respondents included community leaders, politicians, local government officials, civil society practitioners, and retired or serving civil servants. The choice of ten interviews was justified on the basis of data saturation, as themes and perspectives began to recur consistently, indicating that additional interviews would yield diminishing returns. This sample size also ensured manageability while maintaining depth and richness of insights.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic content analysis. Coding was guided by the study's objectives, with emergent themes organised around the nature of godfatherism, its impact on democratic consolidation, and its implications for rural development. Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing interview data with documentary sources, thereby enhancing validity. Ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the research process; respondents were given the opportunity to freely participate and withdraw whenever they so wished. This was done to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Nature and Character of Godfatherism in Plateau State

The findings of the study reveal that political godfatherism in Plateau State is tied to the powers of the incumbent governor. In the Plateau State context, godfatherism denotes the exhibition of dominant powers by the governor in office in deciding the fate of individuals and skewing democratic processes in a manner that serves his interests. The incumbent governor mostly determines who succeeds in elective and appointive public positions; he also controls the distribution and allocation of projects and infrastructure, and, more importantly, incumbent governors through the Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission (PLASIEC) solely determine the outcomes of local government elections across the 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the state. This pattern of control is not incidental but structural, because state governors in Nigeria directly or indirectly control the state's administrative structure, including that of the local government areas. For instance, members of the State Electoral Commission who are saddled with the responsibility of conducting LGA elections are appointed by the state governor, and the resources meant for LGAs are controlled by the state through the State–LGA Joint Account. This pattern of dominance exercised by incumbent governors evidently entrenches patronage networks, rendering all other political actors in the state subordinate to them. Since this kind of political dominance is constitutionally bounded, upon leaving office, the outgoing governor's influence wanes significantly, thereby creating a space for the successor to assume the role of the dominant political godfather in the state.

Respondents consistently articulated this dynamic:

> *"In Plateau State, whoever emerges as governor automatically becomes the political godfather in the state. He decides who emerges as the candidate of the ruling political party in every electoral contest in the state, especially at the LGA level, and who gets what. However, the moment he leaves office, such*

*privilege ceases because he has no power to make appointments or influence electoral outcomes anymore, since he is no longer the governor." (KII 1, Political Actor)*

*"The power of the governor is not limited to the state alone but is extended to the local government areas because he controls the LGA structure. Every governor in the history of Plateau State since 1999 has ensured that he controlled the political structure of the various LGAs. That is why every state governor, upon swearing-in, illegally dissolves elected council officials and constitutes Management/Transition Committees; and even when they eventually conduct LGA elections, they ensure that their protégés emerge." (KII 2, Civil Society Practitioner)*

*"In most cases, rural projects and contractors are dictated by the State Governor. I remember that during the tenure of Governor Jonah Jang, all 17 LGAs across the state were mandated to sponsor the construction of 5km roads, which were directly overseen by the state Ministry of Works. Despite the fact that the projects were undertaken using local government funds, all the contractors were allies of either the governor or his cohorts." (KII 3, Former Director of Personnel Management)*

This finding is in agreement with the core principles of elite theory, which posits that public policies and decisions are skewed to serve the parochial interests of a few individuals in society. In Plateau State, governance is personalised rather than institutionalised; elite mediation determines democratic outcomes and the allocation and distribution of public goods and resources, rather than popular participation and collective needs. Albert (2005) captures this dynamic in his characterisation of the 'parasitic nature' of godfatherism as one of the most debilitating forces that hinder political development in Nigeria. In practical terms, political godfatherism undermines rural development by ensuring that public policies and programmes reflect the preferences of the governor and his network rather than the needs and priorities of communities.

Access to political power, especially the office of governor, rather than personal wealth, is the major determinant of godfather status in Plateau State. This character of political godfatherism in the state distinguishes it from scenarios and experiences in Kwara and Anambra states, where individuals' capacity to monetise the electoral process is the primary determinant of political dominance and godfather status (Albert, 2005). This signifies that the state machinery is largely used to reinforce patronage networks and the politics of godfatherism in Plateau State. Most respondents noted that 'incumbent governors use the state apparatus to demonstrate their capacity by influencing state institutions and agents to ensure the emergence of their protégés by whatever means that could advance their self-interests at all costs' (KII Composite Observation).

### 4.2 Disruption of Local Government Tenure and Its Implications for Rural Development

One of the most far-reaching exhibitions of gubernatorial dominance and godfatherism in Plateau State is the routine dissolution of elected local government officials whenever a new state government comes into office. Respondents consistently emphasised that every governor upon assumption of office has removed elected LGA officials and replaced them with Caretaker/Transition Committees that can advance his interests (KII Composite Observation). This practice has been upheld by all four administrations in the state

since 1999 across the seventeen LGAs, with adverse consequences for local government autonomy, democratic principles, and the prospects for sustainable rural development.

The KII revealed detailed and consistent accounts of how this pattern of political dominance operates and its consequences for participatory democracy and community development:

> *"Since 1999, all successive state governors have wanted to install their protégés as local government officials. For that reason, they often truncate the tenure of existing elected LGA officials and appoint Caretaker Committee members who will be absolutely loyal to them. The appointed committees often prioritise remaining in the governor's good books by striving to please him at all costs rather than undertaking developmental projects." (KII 3, Former LGA Director of Personnel Management)*

> *"The problem we often face is the interference in the administration of Local Government Areas by state governors. They consistently terminate the tenure of local government officials without recourse to constitutional provisions, which often leads to rural project abandonment, embezzlement, and lack of policy consistency due to abrupt changes in the LGA hierarchy." (KII 4, Community Leader)*

> *"Those appointed as Caretaker Committee members usually have no clear blueprint to foster rural development other than being self-serving stooges of the governors. They misappropriate local government funds on issues that do not contribute to rural development. For instance, there was a time when the Caretaker Chairman of a Local Government Area, despite owing LGA staff three months of salary arrears, went ahead to sponsor the burial of a prominent man with millions of naira based on the governor's instructions." (KII 5, LGA Civil Servant)*

These revelations further confirm how incumbent governors' dominance entrenches godfatherism in a way that weakens democracy and undermines sustainable rural development. Local Government Caretaker Committees are appointed to consolidate political dominance rather than for political development or community accountability; thus, they prioritise the consolidation of patronage networks over the delivery of developmental outcomes. Rural projects and policies initiated by preceding administrations are routinely abandoned upon regime change at the LGA level, regardless of their merits, which undeniably distorts even well-conceived rural development initiatives.

This finding is consonant with Omotola's (2007) assertion that political godfatherism has assumed epidemic proportions and constitutes a threat to democratic consolidation and political development. The finding also resonates with the elite theory proposition, which emphasises the vertical control of local government as an instrument wielded against the rural poor in order to sustain elite dominance through state machinery and resources. This is made possible by the persistent operation of a joint state–local government account system, despite the constitutional recognition of LGAs as autonomous. The 2024 Supreme Court ruling that affirmed LGA financial autonomy — and the subsequent opposition to it by state governors — is a confirmation of the structural subordination of LGAs to state governors for political interests.

### 4.3 Imposition of Rural Development Projects Without Community Participation

Rural communities in Plateau State are systematically excluded from the conception, design, and implementation of rural development projects that are ostensibly intended for their benefit. Projects or policies imposed through a top-down approach hamper effective rural development. In Plateau State, rural project selection and implementation are elite-driven, in the sense that they are based on patronage networks and not on the demands and priorities of rural communities. Incumbent governors attach preference to communities that are politically more relevant and accommodating to them based on political calculations, rather than considering the peculiar needs of the various rural localities.

The KII showed how rural dwellers expressed deep frustration at this pattern of exclusion:

> *"Sincerely, I do not think the government is really aware of our plight in this local government, because they keep bringing projects that are not actually needed. They only implement what they want without minding our priorities. For instance, the legacy project in Langtang South initiated by the last administration should have been a water project because that is our primary concern, and not the renovation of the Government Secondary School in Mabudi. Virtually all the villages in the LGA have no good source of water, but here we are with nothing after decades of suffering." (KII 6, Traditional Ruler)*

> *"At most times, the government initiates projects that serve their own interests instead of giving us what we actually need. The past administration of Governor Lalong went and built what it called a Legacy Project, sited after Daika village; the project is said to be a referral hospital, but it is less than 10km away from the Mangu General Hospital, whereas most of our villages here in Mangu have no access roads or portable water." (KII 7, Civil Servant, Mangu)*

These accounts further confirm the gubernatorial imposition of elite-centric rural projects that are entirely incoherent with the priorities of the rural populace. Shut (2014) asserts that supply-driven rural development initiatives undermine project ownership and relevance, thereby resulting in a lack of user input and sustainable rural development. Community participation in project conception and implementation will therefore enhance inclusive governance, guarantee the safety of rural projects and infrastructure, and enable long-term utilisation.

Elite theory emphasises the marginalisation of the masses by elites in the polity for parochial reasons. This pattern of governance weakens democracy, as entrenched dominance operates at the expense of popular participation, which is a core tenet of democracy. This buttresses the need for a bottom-up approach, specifically the Community-Driven Development (CDD) approach, as a viable alternative for rural development (Shut, 2014). Identifying the priorities and needs of the rural population is significant in ensuring durable rural development outcomes and building confidence in governance.

### 4.4 Inequitable Distribution of Rural Projects and Infrastructure

Respondents consistently emphasised that the distribution of rural projects and infrastructure in Plateau State is largely shaped by patronage networks. Political loyalty to the incumbent governor, rather than objective assessments of community needs, determines the allocation of projects. Communities with stronger political connections tend to benefit more than those with weaker political linkage to the governor or his cohorts. This has inevitably led

to community neglect and uneven allocation of rural projects and infrastructure. Some respondents expressed their frustrations as follows:

> *"This LGA is one of the least developed in Plateau State because we have never had a governor or an influential person closely affiliated with the governor from our locality. LGAs that enjoy such privileges receive more rural project allocations. For instance, from 1999 to 2007, when Dariye was governor, he constructed the Barkin-Ladi–Bokkos Road, connected electricity to Bokkos, and established Plateau State University in Bokkos because he is from there. Jang similarly connected most settlements in Jos-South with road networks; Lalong did the same in Shendam; and Mutfwang is doing the same in Mangu." (KII 9, Community Chief, Wase)*

> *"Rural development is undertaken based on favouritism. In the entire state, I doubt there is a district with a road network as developed as 'Du' in Jos-South LGA; the reason being that former Governor Jang is from there. In Barkin-Ladi LGA, especially Fan District, our perishable goods such as tomatoes often spoil on the farm due to the lack of access roads." (KII 10, Youth Leader, Barkin-Ladi)*

This pattern of rural development benefits only communities well-connected to the governor, at the expense of fair representation and equitable project allocation. It is largely a political strategy to consolidate the political base of incumbent governors by deploying resources to their home areas in order to reinforce their political relevance and dominance. Their respective localities come to see them as emancipators, while less politically advantaged communities are excluded from due development.

This finding is consonant with the elite theory proposition, which emphasises resource allocation as a means of societal control rather than as a mechanism to achieve needed rural development and inclusivity. The finding resonates with Ebong et al.'s (2017) assertion that uneven project or resource allocation hinders equitable rural development and the advancement of the socio-economic prospects of rural dwellers. This experience deepens inequality and structurally entrenches the marginalisation of less advantaged rural communities.

## 5.1 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that political godfatherism in Plateau State is structurally entrenched in the powers of incumbent governors, who dominate electoral processes, manipulate local government autonomy, and dictate rural project allocation. This dominance undermines democratic consolidation by weakening participatory governance, eroding accountability, and perpetuating patronage networks. Rural development outcomes are distorted, as projects are imposed without community input, often abandoned with regime changes, and distributed based on loyalty rather than need. Ultimately, governance in Plateau State reflects elite capture rather than institutionalised democracy, leaving rural communities marginalised and development aspirations unmet. Addressing this challenge requires systemic reforms that insulate local governance from gubernatorial overreach and prioritise community-driven development.

In line with the above findings, the study makes the following recommendations, which, if implemented, will go a long way towards mitigating the problem of political godfatherism on democratic consolidation and rural development in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State:

1. Guarantee Local Government Autonomy: Local government councils must be protected from arbitrary dissolution by state governors through enforceable constitutional and institutional safeguards. Financial and administrative autonomy should be guaranteed, enabling LGAs to function as genuine grassroots institutions accountable to citizens rather than political patrons.
2. Reform Electoral Administration: Local government elections should be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) instead of state electoral commissions. This reform will reduce gubernatorial interference, enhance credibility, and ensure that electoral outcomes reflect the will of the people rather than elite manipulation.
3. Establish a Rural Development Agency: A specialised agency should be created to oversee rural project planning and implementation. Its mandate should include needs assessment, equitable distribution of infrastructure, and monitoring of project execution. This will prevent patronage-driven allocation and ensure that rural communities benefit from development initiatives.
4. Adopt Community-Based Approaches: Rural development should be anchored in participatory models where communities identify priorities, contribute to project design, and take ownership of outcomes. This approach enhances sustainability, fosters accountability, and ensures that projects are relevant to local needs rather than imposed by political elites.

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