

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL  
GODFATHERISM AND ELECTORAL CREDIBILITY IN  
NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2015 AND 2019  
GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS IN BENUE STATE**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper offers a comparative analysis of the phenomenon of political godfatherism and its impact on electoral credibility in Nigeria, focusing on the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections in Benue State. The study aims to achieve three objectives: identifying the activities of political godfathers, uncovering the causes of godfatherism, and examining its impact on electoral credibility during the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections in Benue State. To accomplish these objectives, the paper employs the Clientelism Theory as an analytical framework and collects data from primary sources, such as Key Informant Interview (KII), and secondary sources, including books, journals, and web-based materials. The data gathered from the Key Informant Interviews (KII) were analysed using atlas. t software. The findings reveal that the activities of political godfathers manifest in various forms, including the sponsorship and endorsement of candidates, networking, and vote-buying. Additionally, the study identifies the primary causes of godfatherism as the funding of elections and the struggle for state resources. The impacts of godfatherism are found to include influencing electoral outcomes, accessing state resources, underdevelopment, poor governance, clashes of interest, and the neglect or marginalization of certain zones within the state. The paper concludes that political godfatherism in Benue State undermines electoral credibility by promoting undemocratic practices and poor governance. Based on these findings, the paper recommends several measures: strengthening electoral laws, encouraging widespread political education, promoting internal democracy within political parties, implementing policies that foster good governance and accountability, diversifying the state economy, ensuring equity and justice in the allocation of resources and development projects, and intensifying anti-corruption efforts to dismantle the networks of influence and patronage that perpetuate godfatherism.

**Keywords:** Political Patronage, Political Godfatherism, Electoral Integrity, Electoral Credibility, Gubernatorial Election

## **INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigeria is deeply entrenched, tracing its roots to the colonial era when British administrators often relied on local elites to maintain control. This established a precedent for patron-client relationships that have persisted through the nation's political evolution. During Nigeria's First Republic (1960-1966), regional leaders such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa exerted influence and control over political activities. These leaders were essentially benevolent and progressive, and they avoided misusing their positions by refraining from placing excessive

demands on their protégés. According to Gambo (2007), Sir Ahmadu Bello of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Action Group (AG) were driven by a genuine desire to advance the developmental aspirations of the people rather than using their protégés as mere surrogates to serve narrow, parochial interests. Subsequent military regimes from the late 1960s to the late 1990s did little to dismantle these networks; instead, military rulers frequently co-opted or replaced existing godfathers with loyalists to sustain their regimes.

Godfatherism in contemporary Nigerian politics effectively disenfranchises the populace. Instead of the people having the power to elect their leaders, they become subjugated to the decisions of a minority who act as the new kingmakers, determining who ascends to power (Nwobodo, 2024). This perspective is echoed by Ugwu and Ugwuja (2016), who argue that the power to govern is usurped from the citizens and concentrated in the hands of a few self-serving individuals' intent on exploiting the government for their personal gain. The exclusion of citizens from decision-making processes on matters that impact their lives has severely undermined democratic principles and achievements. This erosion is attributable to a highly militarized and monetized political environment dominated by political godfathers, their enforcers, and private militias. Such conditions have led to significant disruptions in economic activities, including education, healthcare, security (due to political conflicts), agriculture, housing, and infrastructure development, thereby impeding progress in these critical areas (Ugwu, Izueke, & Obasi, 2013).

The transition to civilian rule in 1999 marked a new era, yet godfatherism persisted. Prominent political godfathers such as Lamidi Adedibu in Oyo State, Chris Uba in Anambra State, and Olusola Saraki in Kwara State among others became renowned for their roles in manipulating electoral outcomes and controlling state resources. These figures often engaged in practices such as vote-buying and candidate sponsorship to maintain their influence. Since Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, the country's democratic system has remained highly disorganized. Politics has increasingly become characterized by factionalism, and patronage has become essential for maintaining political power (Onuigbo, Okoye & Anemje, 2023). Today, godfatherism continues to shape Nigerian politics, contributing to electoral malpractice, corruption, and governance challenges (Ajadike, 2010, Nkwede, Ibeogu, & Nwankwo, 2014; Asogwa, 2017; Muhammad, 2021). This phenomenon has emerged as a substantial threat, undermining the core principles of democratic governance and depriving Nigerians of the rightful dividends of democracy. Oghuvbu (2023, p. 58) concurs with this perspective, observing that since the return of democratic governance in 1999, the rise of godfatherism has hindered democratic consolidation, weakened effective state governance, and limited rather than expanded democratic representation.

Godfatherism has become so influential in Nigerian politics that politicians rarely succeed without the strong backing of powerful patrons (Edigin, 2010). This perspective aligns with Omotola's assertion (2007, p. 135) that, "Despite godfatherism being an entrenched feature of Nigerian politics over the years, its contemporary manifestations suggest that it has reached epidemic proportions, emerging as one of the most significant threats to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria." Expounding on this viewpoint, Albert (2005, p.79), referencing Nnamani (2003), posits that the archetypal Nigerian godfather surpasses even the ruthless figures depicted in Mario Puzo's Italian Mafia narratives. While the fictional godfather is portrayed as a "shadowy, daredevil recluse who combines immense underworld financial

muscle with near-mythical powers of enormous proportions" to expand his substantial financial empire, the Nigerian counterpart is further characterized by arrogance, egotism, verbosity, pettiness, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion. Despite efforts at political reforms and anti-corruption measures, the phenomenon remains a significant obstacle to democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria. Chukwuemeka and Orji (2013, p. 214) encapsulate this issue, asserting that: "the advent of godfatherism in Nigeria's Fourth Republic significantly threatened not only good governance but also the socio-economic stability of democratic governance". They highlight that one of the most troubling and damaging impacts of godfatherism was its ability to undermine the integrity of the electoral process, preventing a genuinely free, fair, and credible election. The electorate's right to freely choose their representatives was subverted as godfathers imposed their preferred candidates on the populace, a practice profoundly detrimental to the principles of democratic rule.

In Benue State, the influence of political godfathers has been particularly pervasive since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Senator George Akume, serving as Governor from 1999 to 2007, emerged as a notable godfather. His influence was pivotal in the election of Gabriel Suswam as his successor. Akume's role exemplified the typical godfather approach of endorsing candidates, mobilizing resources, and ensuring loyalty to maintain control over the political apparatus. Gabriel Suswam, who governed from 2007 to 2015, also became a significant figure in Benue's godfatherism narrative, reflecting the cyclical nature of the phenomenon where former protégés become new godfathers.

In recent years, the dynamics of godfatherism in Benue State have continued to evolve, with ongoing power struggles between different political factions and influential individuals. The relationship between godfathers and their protégés often results in political conflicts, affecting governance and development in the state (Erdoo, Fada, & Abughdyer, 2021). Against this backdrop, this paper examines the impact of godfatherism on electoral credibility in Benue State, focusing on the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Edigin (2010) defines a Godfather as a person who sponsors or provides support for a person or project. In the words of Akinola (2009, p. 269), 'a godfather is a kingmaker, boss, mentor, and principal, while a godson is the beneficiary and recipient of the legacy of a godfather. Coker (2004) noted that godfathers of Nigerian politics have always used their positions, power and influence for their personal aggrandizement to the detriment of the poor masses. Put differently, Godfathers are influential figures who control decisions on "who, what, when, and how" within the spheres of power (Akinola, 2009). Godfathers are politically influential figures capable of directing support toward specific political parties or candidates on the basis of their endorsement. Individuals who engage in godfatherism are referred to as godfathers, whereas those who gain from their support are known as godsons.

Chukwuemeka, Oji, and Chukwurah (2013) define godfatherism as a political system in which a prominent figure within a major or ruling party supports a favoured individual, often a subordinate or protégé, to become the party's gubernatorial candidate. This influential person ensures the protégé's victory in the gubernatorial election by any means necessary, regardless of the protégé's popularity or electoral appeal. Godfathers are individuals with the authority and influence to determine not only who is nominated for elections but also who emerges victorious. In this context, godfatherism involves candidates aligning themselves with someone

believed to have the power to secure a favourable result in an election. It represents a tradition of seeking a political patron to advance one's political ambitions (Rasak, Oye, Ake & Raji, 2017).

Adding to the conceptualization of political godfatherism, Abah and Udoikah (2024, p. 5) describe it as a prevalent system where ruling elites wield significant influence within the Nigerian political landscape. These elites establish political trajectories and dictate who should follow them, either by invoking Harold Laswell's conception of politics as determining 'who gets what, when, how, and why,' or by adopting Niccolò Machiavelli's ruthless political tactics, epitomized by the 'do or die' approach, where the end justifies the means. Such godfathers are revered by their followers and regarded as individuals destined by nature to lead society to a state of prosperity.

Samuel, Ikechi, and Nikade (2024) investigated the perceptions of Rivers State residents regarding the political godfatherism involving former Governor Nyesom Wike and his successor, Siminalayi Fubara, and its impact on governance in the state. The study aimed to understand residents' views on godfatherism in governance, assess the extent of its interference in the case of Wike and Fubara, and identify strategies to reduce such interference to ensure effective governance. Grounded in Elite theory and Perception theory, the research employed a survey design with a population of 3,537,190 registered voters in Rivers State, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission. Using the Keyton table, a sample size of 384 was selected, and a simple random sampling technique was applied across the 23 Local Government Areas of the State. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed that residents perceive godfatherism as a deviation from democratic principles and view its interference in governance as significantly high. They believe that credible electoral systems and active citizen participation in governance can mitigate the influence of powerful godfathers. The study recommended that the selection process during internal party primaries should be collective rather than imposed by a few individuals. Additionally, clear role definitions and mutual understanding between ruling parties, elected officials, and various government branches are essential. All stakeholders, including electoral officers, political parties, security agents, and the electorate, must uphold the democratic principle that governance should reflect the majority's will, without subverting it.

Muhammad (2021) conducted an in-depth examination of the nature, character, and dynamics of the 2015 PDP Gubernatorial Primaries in Kaduna State, utilizing Elite theory to analyse godfather politics in Nigeria. The study employed a multistage sampling technique to determine the population. The state was divided into three senatorial zones, from which two Local Government Areas were selected. Adhoc delegates from these areas were systematically chosen for interviews. The data were presented via a simple percentage statistical method, with the interpretation of the analysed data related to the study's objectives displayed in tabular form. The research revealed a lack of internal democracy within the Kaduna State chapter of the People's Democratic Party between 1999 and 2015, identifying several major challenges: godfatherism, money politics, the influence of powerful elites, incumbency factors, the exclusion of rank-and-file members in decision-making, the application of federal character principles, rural-cosmopolitan politics, and ethno-religious factors. The study revealed that the effects of godfatherism included the widespread destruction of lives and property, the transformation of young citizens into hooligans and thugs, the proliferation of arms and ammunition, the politicization of employment, increased poverty levels, and a general

disrespect for the rule of law. The study recommends that party members should be allowed to freely elect their representatives during general elections.

Anyaoha and Chukwu (2019) explore the dynamics of godfather politics and the proliferation of arms in Nigeria, emphasizing their potential impact on the country's future. The findings indicate a rise in violence associated with these issues, which poses serious threats to lives and property, disrupts business operations, and deters both local and international investment, thereby impeding Nigeria's development. The study underscores that the growing prevalence of godfather politics and arms proliferation has severely compromised the integrity of elections since President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration began in 1999. This erosion of legitimacy is linked to the increasing violence and weaponization of elections, leading to a widespread perception that elections have become mere formalities rather than genuine democratic processes. Additionally, the study highlights that the rivalry among godfathers to dominate state power and resources by installing preferred candidates has weakened democratic governance. The surge in political assassinations, organized kidnappings, and other violent acts has caused numerous deaths, displaced thousands, and led to significant property damage

Nwambuko, Uchechukwu, and Omiunu (2024) conducted an in-depth analysis of the politics of godfatherism and its effects on democratic governance in Nigeria, focusing specifically on the political crisis in Rivers State. The study aimed to identify the environmental factors contributing to the prevalence of godfatherism in Rivers State, assess its impact on democratic governance, and propose strategies to mitigate its influence. Utilizing elite theory and a descriptive survey research design, the researchers gathered data from both primary and secondary sources, employing a structured questionnaire for data collection. The study's population consisted of 5,198,716 residents in Rivers State, with a sample size of 400 determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The collected data were analysed using tables and percentages, while the hypotheses were tested with chi-square analysis. The findings revealed that environmental factors significantly contribute to the politics of godfatherism in Rivers State, which in turn adversely affects democratic governance. The study also identified strategic measures to curb the influence of godfatherism. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended preventing undue influence from political godfathers, enforcing campaign finance regulations, and ensuring a level playing field for all candidates before and during elections in Nigeria.

Ita, Udoaka, and Ekpo (2024) investigated the pervasive issue of godfatherism within Nigeria's two principal political parties, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), and its ramifications for internal party democracy, party stability, and governance. The study posited that godfatherism has entrenched itself as a significant sub-political culture within Nigeria's party system. Data for the study were gathered through surveys and analysed using the elite theory as a framework of analysis. Simple Linear Regression, conducted with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) at a significance level of 0.05, was utilized to test the hypothesis. The results revealed that the influence of godfathers adversely affects internal party democracy, leading to diminishing support from party loyalists who perceive the parties as unstable and directionless, particularly when controversies remain unresolved or poorly managed. Furthermore, internal party crises driven by godfather politics have resulted in frequent leadership changes and growing dissatisfaction among citizens, undermining the parties' electoral prospects. Consequently, the study recommended that political parties reduce their dependency on party elites (godfathers) for funding to mitigate manipulation and crises. It also advocated for the integration of internal



democracy principles into party constitutions and the proactive resolution of grievances by party leadership.

Empirical evidence implicates godfatherism in various electoral crises, including rigging, violence, and other election-related disturbances, as well as governance issues in Nigeria. States where this phenomenon has prominently manifested include Anambra, Borno, Delta, Edo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kwara, Plateau, Ogun, and Oyo. The activities of Nigeria's political godfathers are particularly significant and include the enthronement of political rascality and normless politics, the binding of godsons or protégés, the creation of parallel party structures, the diversion of public funds, the falsification of election results, mechanisms for political subjugation and oppression, financial influence in politics, the enlistment of unemployed youth as political thugs for electoral and political violence, and the substitution of party flagbearers (Abah & Udoikah, 2024).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the clientelism theory articulated by James C. Scott in 1972. The theory offers a comprehensive framework for analysing the dynamics of political patronage and its implications for electoral credibility. In the context of Benue State's gubernatorial elections in 2015 and 2019, this theoretical framework is utilized to examine the influence of clientelist relationships on electoral processes. The theoretical assumptions underpinning clientelism theory are applied to this study, as detailed in the following analysis:

#### **Assumption 1: Exchange of Resources**

In Benue State's political landscape, political godfathers, wielding significant economic and social capital, engage in patron-client relationships where they provide material resources to constituents in exchange for political support. This exchange is pivotal in shaping voter behaviour and electoral outcomes, as voters reciprocate by supporting candidates backed by influential godfathers.

#### **Assumption 2: Asymmetrical Power Relations**

Clientelism operates within a framework of asymmetrical power relations, where political godfathers exert considerable influence over voters through the distribution of resources and strategic alliances. This power asymmetry allows godfathers to manipulate electoral processes, influencing candidate selection and voter turnout to favour their interests.

#### **Assumption 3: Instrumental Voting**

Voter behaviour under clientelist arrangements is characterized by instrumental voting, where electoral choices are driven by the perceived benefits from supporting patron-supported candidates rather than ideological alignment or policy considerations. This instrumental approach compromises the authenticity of electoral mandates and challenges the credibility of electoral outcomes in Benue State.

Assumption 4: Long-Term Dependence

Clientelist practices foster enduring dependencies among voters on political godfathers for continued access to resources and opportunities. This dependency transcends electoral cycles, reinforcing the influence of godfathers over political decisions and governance outcomes in Benue State.

Assumption 5: Informal Networks

Clientelism thrives within informal networks of personal relationships, community ties, and ethnic affiliations that facilitate the exchange of resources between patrons and clients. These networks play pivotal roles in mobilizing electoral support and consolidating political influence, thereby shaping electoral dynamics and governance structures.

Assumption 6: Impact on Governance

The prevalence of political godfatherism underlines governance challenges in Benue State, including weakened institutional accountability, heightened corruption risk, and a prioritization of short-term electoral gains over long-term developmental policies. This undermines democratic governance by perpetuating patronage-based politics and compromising the public interest.

Assumption 7: Cultural and Social Embeddedness

Clientelism is deeply embedded in Benue State's political culture, reflecting traditional norms of reciprocity and personal connections in political interactions. These cultural factors reinforce clientelist practices, contributing to their persistence despite efforts to reform electoral systems and strengthen democratic institutions.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research adopts an ex post facto design and employs a survey methodology to collect qualitative data. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with participants selected from politicians, the electorate, and staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, and the data collected were analysed via atlas. t software.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

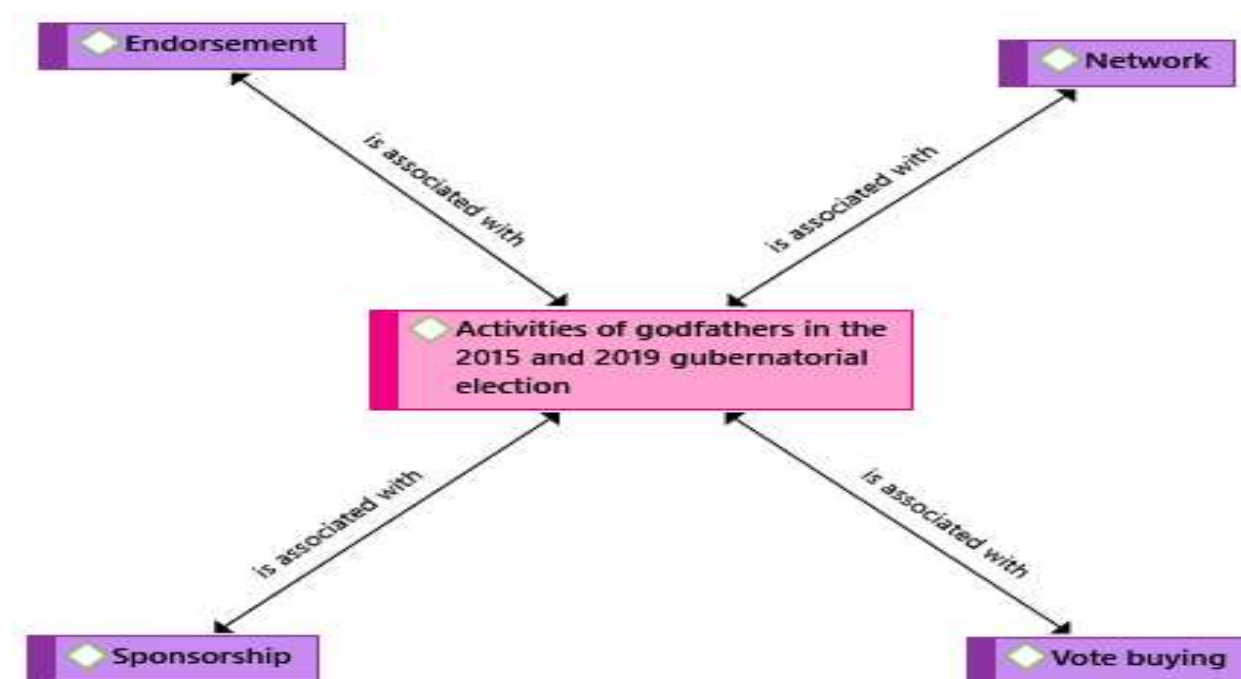
This section presents, analyses, and interprets data collected from the field survey via Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Data analysis was conducted via the atlas. t software. A word cloud was generated to identify the themes and subthemes, as shown in the figure below.





Figure 2 shows the three maps. Three themes were developed in line with the research objectives: the activities of godfathers in the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections, the causes of godfatherism, and the impacts of godfatherism.

### Activities of Godfathers in the 2015 and 2019 Gubernatorial Elections in Benue State



**Figure 3:** Activities of Godfathers; **Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Figure 3 shows Theme One: Activities of Godfathers. Four subthemes were developed: sponsorship, endorsement, network, and vote buying.

#### Sponsorship of Candidates

Part of the activities of godfathers in Benue State involved sponsoring their preferred candidates from the pre-election phase to the post-election period. The interviews revealed the following:

Between 2015 and 2019, the influence of godfatherism on Benue State's governorship elections was detrimental. Political godfathers often sponsor candidates with their own selfish interests in mind, which is reflected in the candidates' performance once in office. This has contributed to long-term underdevelopment in the Benue State (R2).

#### Endorsement of Candidates

Another activity of godfathers is endorsing candidates who contest in elections. The interviews further revealed the following:

I want to highlight the importance of endorsement, particularly by influential individuals in society whose track records speak for them. Their support gives a

candidate an advantage over others. However, political godfatherism has led to numerous negative consequences in politics and governance (R5).

### **Network Establishment**

Ending godfatherism in the state is currently challenging because there is a perceived need for younger politicians to learn from the experiences and perspectives of their older counterparts in politics. Thus, godfatherism serves as a form of mentorship for younger politicians, fostering collaboration among them to secure electoral victories. This insight was revealed in the interviews conducted:

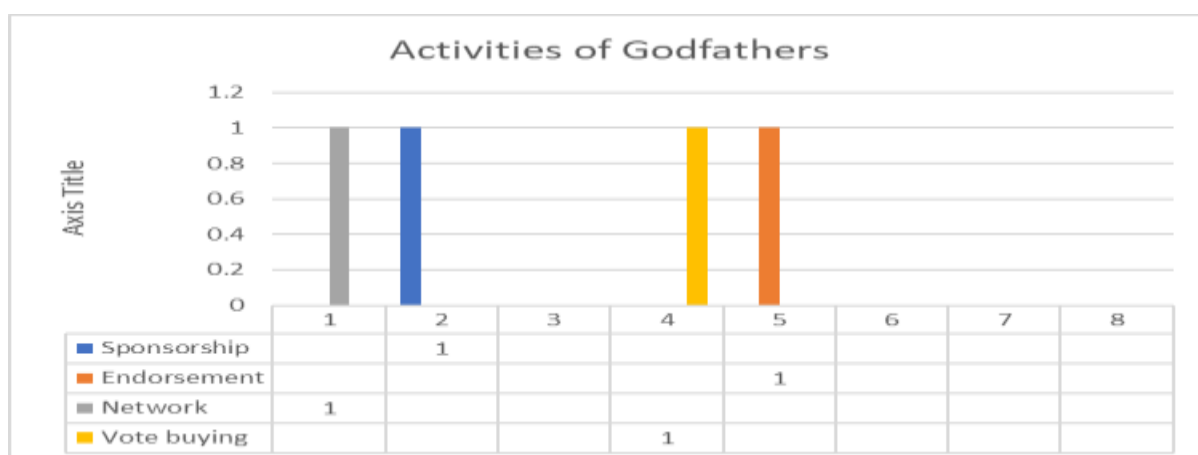
It is a systemic issue where new political entrants often seek support from established figures who have built extensive networks and structures within society. These political structures enable candidates to traverse the state, garner votes, and gain favour from those whom they have previously supported. In 2015, we observed a prominent case of godfatherism where a gubernatorial aspirant successfully aligned with long-standing political actors (R1).

The theoretical premise of clientelism, which underscores the significance of informal networks, is congruent with the observation that godfatherism functions as a mentorship framework for emerging politicians. This relationship fosters collaboration among these individuals, facilitating electoral success through the strategic exchange of resources and mutual support.

### **Vote buying**

Another role of a godfather is engaging in vote buying. While some argue that political godfatherism can be beneficial, it is widely accepted that no political system, even in the United States, where our democracy is modelled after, operates without influential figures guiding newcomers. In Africa, including in Benue State, political leaders have historically relied on godfathers to navigate and secure positions of political power. This mentorship is seen as essential in the complex landscape of politics.

The interviews revealed that during the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections, godfathers went to great lengths to ensure that their candidates emerged victorious. They engaged in vote-buying and bribery by INEC officials and distributed items such as sugar, salt, noodles, and other goods to secure victory at any cost (R4). The clientelism theory's assumption that instrumental voting is motivated by the exchange of material benefits for electoral support is empirically demonstrated by the involvement of political godfathers in the 2015 and 2019 governorship elections in Benue State, where their activities were evidenced by systematic vote buying. These findings corroborate those of Asogwa (2017), who reported that godfathers are typically involved in various forms of electoral misconduct, including the theft of ballot boxes and papers, the assassination of opposition candidates, the falsification of election results, encouraging their efforts to embezzle public funds, commanding public security forces to intimidate voters at polling stations across the country, and leveraging their political influence to manipulate public policies.

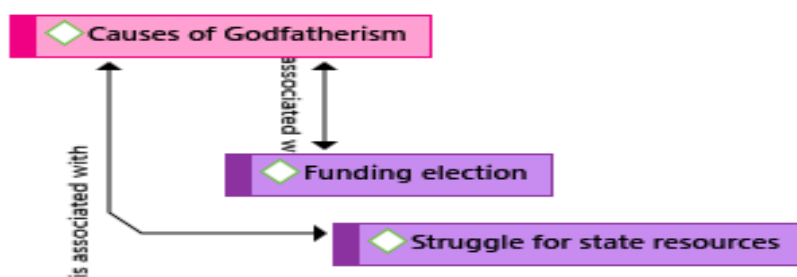


**Figure 4:** Code coding summary for theme one; **Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Figure 4 displays a coding summary table for the subthemes: sponsorship, endorsement, network, and vote-buying. Each subtheme includes discussions from informants.

### Causes of Godfatherism in Benue State

According to the informants, the causes of godfatherism in Benue State include funding elections, politicians' competition for state resources, and the relentless pursuit of electoral victory at any expense.



**Figure 5:** Causes of Godfatherism; **Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Figure 5 depicts the second theme, which is the causes of godfatherism in Benue State. Two subthemes were identified: funding elections and the struggle for state resources.

### Funding Elections

Funding an election campaign is a daunting task, especially for novice politicians, who require funds for printing posters, purchasing campaign vehicles, and covering other expenses. This often compels them to seek financial support from affluent individuals in their bid to win the election at any cost. This insight was revealed in the interviews conducted:

In our elections, financial demands are significant. In 2015, established candidates faced less financial pressure than new candidates who joined the political scene shortly before the election but managed to secure funding from godfathers and won. However, by 2019, a candidate who funded his own campaign without relying on godfathers won

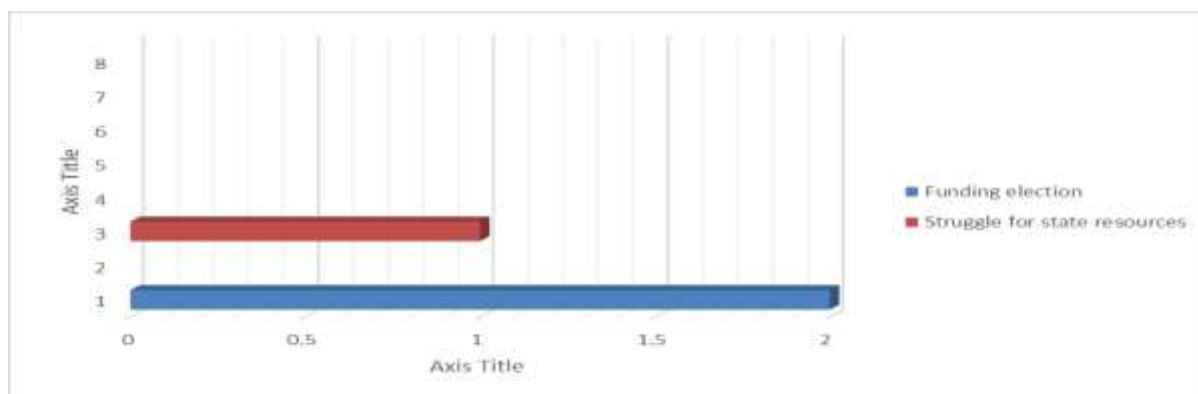
the election but later faced challenges as he was ousted from the power structure that initially supported him. Federal influence also played a crucial role, as securing support at the federal level often determined election outcomes at the state level. Economic conditions and other factors also play significant roles (R1).

These findings are consistent with Nwobodo's (2024) assertion that political parties predominantly rely on contributions from affluent individuals, who subsequently dominate the party's structure. This dependency arises from the party members' inability to generate sufficient funds to support electioneering activities. These findings are also in concordance with the insights of Abah and Udoikah (2024), who reveal that godfathers engage in money politics due to the prevailing influence of wealth in Nigerian political dynamics. In the current political climate, financial resources are the primary drivers of party formation and activities, while ideological considerations are largely marginalized. Consequently, political parties in Nigeria are frequently established by affluent individuals, and wealth becomes the determining factor in the influence and strength of party members' opinions.

### Struggle for State Resources

Political godfathers often have underlying motives when sponsoring elections, with many aiming to influence state resources for personal benefit. The interviews further revealed the following:

The causes of godfatherism in Benue State from 2015 to 2019 have remained consistent, with a primary focus on competition for state resources. Initially, godfathers were regarded as guiding figures for implementing the state's developmental plans. For example, Akume, the current Secretary to the State Government, became a prominent leader in Benue State between 1999 and 2007, with Gamade and other influential figures such as Ayu as his godfathers. Over time, Akume himself became a godfather to others. This trend began during the tenure of Aper Aku, the first executive governor of Benue State, who had Senator J.S. Tarka as his godfather. Tarka is considered a founding figure in Benue politics and a significant influence in the Middle Belt region. Ultimately, godfathers in Benue State have historically been more focused on state resources than on the state's political direction (R3) These findings align with the submission of Opono and Ikuni (2024), who argue that godfatherism has widely come to be seen as transforming Nigeria's democracy into a profit-driven enterprise. They contend that political godfathers exploit every opportunity to install their chosen successors as economic investments, with an expectation of generating exceptional returns at all costs.

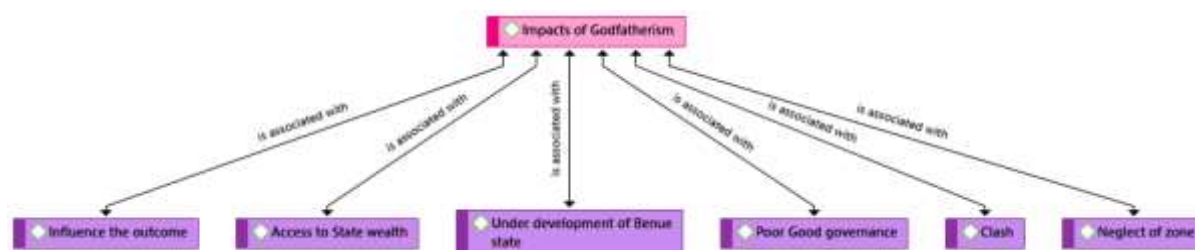


**Figure 6:** Code coding summary for theme two; **Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Figure 6 shows the coding summary for Theme Two. The subtheme funding election and the struggle for state resources. Each subtheme includes discussions from informants.

### **Impact of Godfatherism in Benue State**

The impacts of godfatherism in Benue State include influencing election outcomes, gaining access to state wealth, underdevelopment in the state, a lack of good governance, clashes between political godfathers and their protégés, and the neglect of certain zones.



**Figure 7:** Impacts of Godfatherism; **Source:** Field Survey, 2024.

Figure 7 shows the last theme, which is the impact of godfatherism in Benue State. Several subthemes are included, such as influence on election outcomes, access to state wealth, underdevelopment of Benue State, poor governance, clashes of interest, and neglect of zones.

### **Influence on Outcomes of Elections**

Godfatherism in the Benue State significantly influences who governs the state. The interviews revealed that, in 2019, the incumbent governor did not receive support from his previous benefactor, a key godfather, whose opposition influenced the outcome of the election and the political party that eventually governed the state. Godfathers play a crucial role in determining both who will rule and how well they will govern the state (R1). Another informant added that political godfatherism can propel someone to a position they never dream of attaining, highlighting its substantial influence (R5). A third informant emphasized that political godfathers are driven primarily by personal interests, struggling to have their preferred candidates win elections. The intense interest-based struggles in the 2015 and 2019 elections determined who emerged as governors. The winning group gains control of state resources, whereas the losers struggle to secure any position. This interest-driven dynamic was evident in both elections (R6). These findings corroborate the assertions of Dele, Wakil, and Ikpi (2022), who argue that political godfathers in Nigerian states are not merely campaign financiers. Their influence extends beyond financial resources to include the orchestration of violence and corruption, enabling them to manipulate political systems at the central, state, or local levels in favour of their preferred candidates. The clientelism theory's assumption that sustained reliance on patronage networks influences political outcomes is substantiated by evidence showing that godfathers significantly influenced the results of the 2015 and 2019 governorship elections in Benue State through their entrenched patronage and clientelist connections.

### **Access to State Wealth**

Political godfathers in Benue State seek to control and consolidate power to access the state's wealth, driven by selfish interests rather than the overall good of the people. The interview



findings indicate that one informant expressed that godfatherism has not benefited Benue State. The state's struggles are evident, with once-thriving companies such as Benue Cement, Coca-Cola, and Benue Breweries now defunct. This decline is attributed to the self-serving nature of godfatherism. Key assets, such as the former National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) (now privatized as power holdings), are controlled by those with significant shares in these privatized entities. Similarly, Benue Cement was sold to Dangote, with godfathers retaining shares. This self-interest has prevented the state from controlling its resources, contributing to its decline. The informant emphasized that if leaders acted in the state's interest, Benue would have a thriving economy, leveraging its natural resources, instead of being reduced to a salary-dependent state (R4).

### **Underdevelopment in Benue State**

Political godfatherism in Benue State has both positive and negative impacts. It has provided opportunities for individuals who were previously marginalized due to financial constraints, lack of employment, or limited influence. According to one informant (R2), the negative impact of godfatherism is evident in the underdevelopment experienced by Benue State since 2015. The state has lagged behind in infrastructure development, education, and road network maintenance. Basic services such as healthcare have suffered from neglect, which threatens the state's overall well-being. Another informant (R4) acknowledged both positive and negative effects of godfatherism. While it has facilitated opportunities for political advancement and influence in key offices, it has also perpetuated a system where personal gain often outweighs public welfare. This imbalance has hindered developmental progress in the state. These findings are consistent with the research of Nkwede, Ibeogu, and Nwankwo (2014), who discovered that the rise of godfatherism deprived citizens of the benefits of democratic governance by causing the government to become hesitant in initiating and implementing policies that would improve the well-being of the general public. However, another perspective (R7) strongly emphasizes the negative consequences of godfatherism in Benue politics. The focus on winning elections at all costs has not resulted in positive developmental outcomes. Instead, it has fostered a climate of corruption and neglect of public interests. This conclusion aligns with that of Orbunde and Ogoh (2016), who attributed these issues to a lack of accountability and transparency, leading to a high level of corruption within the system. Finally, an informant (R8) highlighted how godfatherism in Benue State has led to the emergence of political godsons who serve as foot soldiers for their benefactors. This perpetuation of loyalty dynamics often side-lines broader developmental goals. The failure of leadership to address basic needs such as salary payments, infrastructure development, and security has eroded public trust and exacerbated socioeconomic challenges in the state. These findings also align with the views of Onuigbo, Okoye, and Anemje (2023), who argue that the rise of godfatherism in Nigeria represents a significant threat to the country's democratic process, socioeconomic development, good governance, and economic stability.

### **Poor Governance**

Godfatherism in Benue State has exacerbated issues of poor governance, as revealed by interviews. According to one informant (R4), the relationship between godfatherism and governance in Benue State is problematic. Godfathers often impose demands on governors or officeholders that compromise their ability to govern effectively. This interference has led to conflicts between successive governors and their godfathers, such as those between Suswam and Akume, Ortom and Akume, and now Alia and Akume. These conflicts undermine

governance and hinder the state's progress. The informant further criticized the current political system, suggesting that leadership selection is based more on political connections than on merit and public service track records. This practice results in incompetent leaders occupying positions they are ill prepared for, leading to mismanagement of public resources and failure to fulfil campaign promises. (R4). Additional informants (R5 & R6) echoed concerns about the negative consequences of poor governance exacerbated by godfatherism. They highlighted how ineffective leadership has failed to deliver on promises, causing widespread discontent and social unrest. This result is substantiated by the work of Ogoh (2016), which provides evidence of the increasing failure of successive civil governments to address the pressing socioeconomic needs of citizens, despite the numerous appealing campaigns promises made by politicians to the electorate. This indicates that politics in Nigeria is not focused on the people. This situation underscores the detrimental impact of godfatherism on the quality of governance in Benue State. The assumption of clientelism theory, which posits that patron-client relationships undermine democratic governance by prioritizing personal loyalty over merit, aligns with the finding that the activities of political godfathers during the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections in Benue State led to poor governance by entrenching unaccountable leadership and neglecting public interest.

### **Clash of interests**

The clash of interests between godfather and son is another subtheme that emerged. The interviews revealed the following: In 2015, as Governor Suswam was leaving office, he was interested in bringing in a particular successor. However, Senator Dr. George Akume, a prominent political godfather in Benue State and currently the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), opposed this choice. Despite not being the governor, Akume still wielded significant influence and ultimately pushed for Samuel Ortom to become the All Progressives Congress (APC) flag bearer and subsequently won the election. However, conflicts arose afterward because Akume often sees himself as the ultimate authority on good governance and tends to clash with those he supports or who support him. This lack of common ground often leads to tensions and disputes in political relationships (R6).

### **Neglecting the zone**

Godfatherism, originally perceived as political mentorship, has evolved into a system where seasoned politicians wield influence for personal gain rather than fostering genuine mentorship in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State. The system should ideally benefit all participants by imparting valuable political guidance and support. However, in practice, this often results in an unequal distribution of political appointments and resources among different zones, contrary to the principles of fairness and equitable development. There is a sentiment that political positions and resources should be allocated on the basis of merit and need, not on the basis of the dictates of influential figures who prioritize their own interests. This imbalance has led to discontent among the populace, as certain zones feel neglected and marginalized in political decision-making processes (R.6). This situation contrasts with the ideal of godfatherism promoting positive mentorship and guidance in politics.

**Table 1: Code coding summary table**

| Theme                            | R1 | R2 | R3 | R4 | R5 | R6 | R7 | R8 | Total |
|----------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Influence the outcome            | 1  |    |    |    | 1  | 1  |    |    | 3     |
| Access to State wealth           |    |    |    | 1  | 1  |    |    | 1  | 3     |
| Under development of Benue state |    | 1  |    | 1  |    |    | 1  | 1  | 4     |
| Poor governance                  |    |    | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 6     |
| Clash                            |    |    | 1  | 1  |    | 1  | 1  |    | 4     |
| Neglect of zone                  |    |    |    |    |    | 1  |    |    | 1     |

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 presents a coding summary. Poor governance had the highest number of informants, followed by underdevelopment of the Benue State and clashes of interest. The high number of informants reporting poor governance indicates widespread dissatisfaction due to a lack of transparency, accountability, and efficiency, which impedes development and erodes public trust in political institutions.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of the comprehensive analysis conducted in this study, it is evident that political godfatherism in Benue State profoundly influences the integrity of electoral processes, the equitable distribution of resources, and the overall development and governance of the state. The study reveals that political godfathers leverage their influence through practices such as candidate sponsorship, endorsements, network establishment, and vote buying, which are driven primarily by the financing of electoral campaigns and competition for state resources. These actions lead to the manipulation of election outcomes, control over state resource allocation, hindered state development, governance deficiencies, conflicts of interest, and the neglect of specific zones. Ultimately, political godfatherism poses significant challenges to democratic processes and effective governance in Benue State, necessitating comprehensive and targeted interventions to mitigate its adverse effects.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government should implement stringent electoral laws aimed at curbing the influence of political godfathers, including comprehensive regulations on campaign financing and the rigorous monitoring of electoral processes.
2. There is a need for widespread political education campaigns to inform citizens about the detrimental impacts of godfatherism and to emphasize the importance of voting on the basis of policies and the merits of candidates.
3. Political parties should adopt and enforce principles of internal democracy, ensuring that candidates are selected through transparent and fair processes.
4. The government should implement policies that promote good governance and accountability at all levels to diminish the allure of godfatherism.
5. To reduce the economic power of political godfathers, the government should diversify the state's economy and create alternative opportunities for wealth and employment.

6. The government should ensure the equitable distribution of resources and development projects across all senatorial districts of Benue State to address zonal neglect and mitigate regional disparities.
7. The government should intensify anti-corruption efforts to dismantle the networks of influence and patronage that perpetuate godfatherism.

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