

**A STUDY OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS: 2016 – 2020
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN EDO STATE**

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BENIN CITY

OCTOBER, 2023

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A)
HONOURS DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA**

OCTOBER, 2023

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by **SHARON OSAMUDIAMWEN EKIUWA** in the Department of History and International Studies University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

DR. D. O. Iweze
Project Supervisor

DR. FRANK IKPONMWOSA
Ag. Head of Department

DATE

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for seeing me through different stages of my life and walking with me through it all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere and profound gratitude goes to God Almighty for his faithfulness and help in the course of my study.

I deeply appreciate my project supervisor, Dr. D. O. Iweze, for his patience and swift corrections. His guidance and stern knowledge made this project swift. Thank you so much sir.

I sincerely appreciate my lecturers for the knowledge they have impacted in me. Special thanks to my course adviser, Mr. Victor Aigoubarueghian, Prof. E. A. Ifidon, Prof. Eddy O. Erhagbe, Prof. O. B. Osadolor, Dr. Odigwe Nwaokocha, Dr. Toby, Dr. Rev. (Sis.) J. C. Nwaka, Dr. Orukpe, Mr. Daniel Orobator, Mr. Friday Izekor, for their guidance and encouragement, I highly appreciate you, thank you and God bless.

My profound gratitude goes to my wonderful and amazing parents, Pastor Sunny Ekiuwa and Pastor (Mrs.) Vivian Ekiuwa for their emotional, financial and moral supports. Special thanks to my siblings, Emwanta Gaddiel Ekiuwa and Imiefan Jochebed Ekiuwa for their care, love, prayers and supports.

My gratitude goes to my mentor and life's couch, Pastor Sunday Nwaiku, for his words of encouragement, support and prayers throughout my academic years.

My profound gratitude goes to my relatives and friends; Uncle Ben, Osato, David, Mercy, Blessing, Peculiar, Peter, Lois, Karen, Gloria, Landra, Anthony, Efe, Obum, Justin, Chiagozie, Iyenoma, and those not mentioned for all their supports and impact in my life during the course of my studies.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

One of the social need of man is political dominance.¹ Over the years, humans have constantly sort for political control and this has led to the rise and fall of empires, kingdoms, nations and even men.² This political need has traces in every tribe and community on earth, however each community has a special form or mode of operation.³ In region known as Nigeria today, most communities were ruled by kings, emir or Oba as found in the Yoruba and Hausa political structure, while other communities like the Igboland had a decentralized political structure where people come together to direct the affairs of the land.⁴ By 1914 the colonial masters amalgamated all the regions to become present day Nigeria and centralized political ideology was introduced. Be that as it may, it is germane to note that the political structure of Nigeria has been irregular due to the continuous interference by the military since after independence and finally gained democratic ground in 1999. By 1998, the last military leader died and by 1999 Nigerian returned to democratic rule with Former president Olusegun Obasanjo as the Present of Nigeria.⁵ The constitution that followed this republic created room for advance party system where people with like minds come together to contest for political positions at the Federal, State and Local Government level.⁶ The resultant effect of this form of political structure is the

creation of a godfather in politics, where a young political aspirant needs the favor of older politician to get to power and today the Nigerian political system and even other public sector is characterized by godfatherism.⁷

Godfatherism in politics means a form of political corruption in which an influential individual handpicks another, often less influential candidate to attain leadership in order to exert authority or influence.⁸ This issue of godfatherism has eaten so deep into the Nigeria political system to the point that young political aspirant finds it difficult to get to power and even if they do it is always at the mercy of old and wealthy politicians.⁹ However, the recent happenings around the political system in Nigeria shows that Nigerians are tired of this system of government where godfathers dictate who rules over the people.¹⁰ A very good example of such rift is the Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Ambode rift where Amdode did not get the backing of Tinubu for a second term as the governor of Lagos State. Despite all that Ambode did to get the support of Tinubu by visiting the former President Muhammadu Buhari, the APC chairman Tinubu preferred Babajide Sanwo-Olu. Ambode was said to have clipped the wings of some of the said owners of Lagos state by blocking sources through which state fund enters the pocket of these men.

Another good example is the Chris Uba and Chris Ngige rift in Anambra State. The Year 2003 was tensed for Chris Ngigi a former godson to Chris Uba, Ngige the godson of Uba was said to have failed to provide Three Billion Naira that his

godfather had asked of him. He also defaulted on the loyalty form he signed stating that he was going to seek the approval of his godfather on every matter that concerns the state. This tensed rift led to the resignation of Ngige as the governor of Anambra State.¹¹ It is pertinent to note that the godfathers kept having edge over their godson each time there is a rift due to political ignorance of the people. However there was a break in this political system of godfatherism during the Edo State 2020 election.¹² The election took place September 19 2020 with Obaseke as the gubernatorial candidate of PDP (Peoples's Democratic Party), Osagie Ize-Iyamu as the APC (All Progressive Congress) candidate and several minor parties.¹³ Obaseki won over 57.3% of the total votes despite the fact that his godfather, Oshomole wanted Osagie Ize-Iyamu to win the election.¹⁴ To corroborate this fact, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar congratulated the governor elect in this way: "it is not just a victory, but a declaration of independence from the anti-democratic forces of godfatherism and militarism".¹⁵ From the statement of former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, one can vividly see that there was a force of external control which the godfathers wanted to have. However, Obaseki resistance brought some sort of hope to PDP, people of Edo State and Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, building on this premises, this work seeks to examine the concept of godfatherism especially in Nigeria politics using Edo State Governorship Election as a case study.

Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this research is to analyze and document the issue of godfatherism in Nigerian politics using the 2020 governorship election in Edo state. specific objectives of the study are:

- i. to document the origin of godfatherism in Edo State,
- ii. 2016 – 2020 governorship election in Edo State,
- iii. assess the challenges of Godfatherism in the Edo State governorship election.

Scope of the Study

Over the last five years, the citizens of Nigeria started growing strong political awareness especially among young Nigerian citizens.¹⁶ Thus, there was a manifestation of this awareness in the year 2020, first the Edo state governorship election held 19th September 2020 and subsequently the end sars protest that started October 8 2020.¹⁷ All these activities gradually reduced the powers of the godfather as the people took decision making into their hands.¹⁸ Be that as it may, more significantly to this research work is the Edo State election that brought governor Obaseki into power as the governor re-elect of Edo State.¹⁹ He resisted the challenges posed before him by godfathers and rely solely on the will of the people to prevail.²⁰ Therefore, it is on this basis that this research work seek to unravel the concept of godfatherism in Nigeria politics with case study of the Edo State 2020 Governorship

election. The research shall explore the role of godfatherism in the election of 2020 in Edo State as well as analyze the future of godfatherism in Edo State and Nigeria as a whole.

This research covers basically the issue of godfatherism in Nigeria: A case study of Edo State governorship election held in 2020. In an attempt to discuss this topic, there shall be an intensive discussion on the origin of godfatherism in Nigeria politics. There shall also be an examination of Edo State governorship election. The time frame of this research is 2020, when the Edo State governorship election that broke down some of the powers of godfathers in Nigeria politics and started an end to the influence of godfatherism in Edo State. This research will cover Edo State and its environs where the election took place in 2020.

Research Methodology and Sources

Methodology adopted a narrative approach. It also adopts an interdisciplinary approach, accessing information which is relevant for this research from other discipline. The research depends solely on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include; oral sources and archival materials were of enormous significant. The following people were interviewed; Adebimpe Adejumoh and Emmanuel Abaivbugue among others. However, in order to support these primary sources, some secondary source which include; textbooks, newspapers, journals,

projects, thesis and seminar papers etc were also consulted and corroborated with oral interview to prove it reliability.

Literature Review

During the course of this research, some literature were carefully reviewed in order to provide the writer a wider range of issues to buttress on. Some of these useful works are classified into literature on Southern Nigeria, Edo State, Election Procedure in Nigeria and other literatures relevant to this study.

In Onwusiribe, J.A Mbanasor and O.U. Oteh's work titled "Dynamics of Political Structure in Nigeria", the authors look at the political structure in Nigeria during the precolonial times which was diverse and base on socio-cultural believe of the people. Despite the numerous research in Edo State and its political history, nothing was said about the impact of godfatherism on the 2020 governorship election. Therefore, this research is to fill the gap and add to existing literatures on the history of Edo State.²¹

Another, literature reviewed is "Culture and Customs of Benin Kingdom" by T Falola. The central theme of this work is basically on the uniqueness of Benin kingdom. The book started by introducing some amazing fact about Benin kingdom and some of these interesting facts include, the wonderful vegetation found around the Benin, the rich cultural practices and also the wonderful socio-political structure of Benin kingdom. The author went further to discuss the various places where the Edos

can be found. To him, the Edos can be found in Akoko Edo, Esan (South-East, North East, Central, West), Owan and Etsako etc. Nevertheless, despite the wonderful analysis done by Falola, nothing was said about the electoral process in Edo state. Not talking about the electoral process in Edo State means not talking about the role of godfatherism in present day electoral procedure in Edo state and Nigeria as a whole.²²

Rilwan Balogun in his article “Oshiomole’s Travail and the Burden of Political Godfatherism” analyzed how godfatherism is a nasty and cynical phenomenon that has existed from time immemorial in every facet of human endeavor. This analysis shows the reality of the 2008 governorship election in Edo state won by comrade Adams Oshiomole and how Oshiomole’s plight deserves public condemnation rather than public sympathy. In fact, to nail it poignantly, Oshiomole is the ipso facto betrayal who had betrayed the good people of the state, and indeed Nigerian constitution at large, having sworn to uphold the rule of law. This article was concluded with interpreting the Latin maxim quoted at the prelude of this piece which goes thus “no one can derive benefits from his own wrong doing”.²³

Nwokeke P. Osinachukwu’s article titled “The electoral Process and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria”. The author examines election rigging and its effects on democratic consolidation in Nigeria relying on qualitative approach, using data gathered from secondary sources. He also analyzed via content and historical analysis. Election rigging in Nigeria has dealt a huge blow to the development of democracy in

Nigeria. Nigeria's elections so far have not lived up to the expectations due to various forms of electoral manipulations which have denied the country credible free and fair elections in her body politic. Election rigging has not only marred democratic consolidation in Nigeria but has also violated the fundamental human rights of so many Nigerians. The poor democratic practices reviewed in this article since independence will be our bench mark. The author found that poor democratic practices in Nigeria have resulted into the imposition of corrupt and illegitimate leaders who have no regards for principles of democracy which are off-shoots for good governance, rule of law, constitutionalism and fundamental human rights. The author provided some important recommendations that would serve as a panacea to the problems of poor democratic practices and how these means can help necessitate a democratic environment which is a precondition for free and fair elections.²⁴

Adeoye O. Akinola's article titled "Godfatherism and the future of Nigerian democracy" in July 2009 the author analyzes the relationship between godfathers and godsons with a particular attention to its influence on the development of Nigeria's politics, and seeming demise of resourceful governance in the country. The study adopts unstructured interview to elicit the perception of actors involved and political elites, relying on qualitative and content analyses of data. The study found that there was a shift in the modus operandi of post-independence godfatherism, and what obtains in contemporary Nigeria was violence-inspired godfatherism, which successfully replaced politics of welfare by politics of warfare in the affected areas.

This acted as impediments to sustainable democratization process in Nigeria. The study concludes by recognizing the inevitability of godfathers in politics but there was the need for proper management of godfather/godson relationship.²⁵

Olawale, I. A., in his work titled "Explaining 'godfatherism' in Nigeria politics". Political godfatherism started with nationalist activities of the 1950s. The educated elite which constituted just six percent of the total Nigerian population championed this struggle for Nigerian independence." The educated elites, most of whom had only primary education, were respected for their knowledge and bravery in confronting the white man. They became idolised by their people and their personal opinions became the formal interests of the ethnic groups they claimed to represent. People who wanted to join in politics went to them and deferred to their 'good judgment' in almost all things. These father figures were the leaders of regional political groups that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s: the Northern People's Congress for the Hausa-Fulani dominated northern Nigeria; the Action Group for the Yoruba-dominated south-west, and the NCNC for the Igbo-dominated eastern Nigeria. The role of the godfathers at this time was to show the way for the other Nigerians in a colonial system. As an Ibadan politician that belonged to this era noted, 'our job at this time was to teach our followers how to disrespect the white man who wanted to rule us for ever'. The political godfathers of this era included the then Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who led the NPC; Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who led the AG, and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC leader. The other elder statesmen that fell into this category in

Nigerian politics include Mallam Aminu Kano and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim. These political leaders, up to the point of their death, dictated who could occupy political offices in the geo-political regions they led. They were 'clearing houses' for political opportunities.²⁶ Politics of godfatherism has a negative implication on the political arrangement of Nigeria and the citizenry. Certainly, the right to select an aspirant of their choice to rule them is run-down given the conditions in which godfathers decides who is to contest or imposed candidates of their desire on the citizens in the society. This is, to say the smallest and actual aggression to the faiths of democratic rule.²⁷

Ohiole, K. and Ojo. S., in their work titled “Political godfatherism and democratic consolidation in Nigeria” Godfatherism is one of the most essential factors responsible for electoral malpractice in Nigeria. The godfathers assure their godsons of electoral success only to advance their social, political and economic influence. As a result, elections, especially in Nigeria’s fourth republic, have become a tool for promoting the interest of the aristocrat rather than the electorates. The philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept under the carpet making the Nigerian electorates to lose faith in the electoral process and the government.²⁸

Igbini D. M. in his article “Godfatherism and its threat to the Nigeria’s Nascent Democracy” stated that Democracy has promoted political and socio-economic development far more effectively than any other political system across many countries and centuries of history.²⁹ In Nigeria, it has been characterized with political

corruption, ethnic politics, politicking of core government policies and programs and politics of godfatherism. Since the return of democratic rule in 1999 to date, the country witnessed a heightened tempo in the politics of godfatherism, which has not only retarded the process of democratic consolidation but also undermines effective state governance and restricts rather than broadens democratic representation. Godfatherism is one of the greatest glitches facing the Nigerian political system. This paper therefore, attempts a reflection on the nature, causes and effect of godfatherism on Nigeria's nascent democracy. We anchored our investigation on some basic propositions arising from the elite theory and argue that politics of godfatherism negates peaceful coexistence, law and order and poses a threat to the Nigeria's nascent democracy.³⁰

Kingsley E. Okoye's "Choiceless Choice in the 2019 Presidential Election: towards the intrigues perfected by the Electoral system in Nigeria."³¹ The author was only interested in analyzing the outcome of election with little or no effort to understand why electorates who cast their votes during election do not choose their leaders. While we acknowledge that vote buying, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation, and different pattern of malpractices among others contributed to these, we equally noted that the author have not really tried to find out why the electoral system in Nigeria could not allow candidates that would not only attract massive support but become irresistible during and after election. Therefore, what often witnessed among presidential flag bearers in Nigeria candidates who the electorates

knew would not make significant impact if elected. As a result, make them (electorates) see voting during election as a routine exercise that must be fulfilled without enthusiasm or eagerness in carrying out such obligation. Election in this situation becomes so difficult that whosoever is elected is not actually chosen by the electorates but is allowed to keep the country on track. These political parties are only interested on the radical nature of candidates who can withstand the campaign strategies leaving other areas like understanding the political terrain of the country and having the will power to transform society against other odds.

Obakhedo, Neville Onebamhoi, articles “Curbing Electoral Violence in Nigeria: The Imperative of Political Education”. It examines the imperative of political education in curbing this ugly trend if the nation is to enthrone enduring and sustainable democratic order that would be a delight to behold.³² Both domestic and international political sociologist based on empirical investigations argue that the greatest obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is electoral violence. This is a result of the rascal politics that the political elites engage in. Sometimes, the violence is intra-party, and most of the time, it is inter-party. Apart from that this phenomenon affects the credibility of electoral system, the democratic system and the rule of law, the nature, extent and magnitude of violence and rigging associated with elections in Nigeria had assumed alarming proportions that necessitates intellectual excursion to the realm of possible solutions. Education has been discovered to be a major strategy and weapon to curbing this democratic impediment.

Furthermore, “The Ancestors and their Role in Human Life” by D.O. Aghahowa was another literature reviewed. The author was particular about the migration and settlement of the Benin people. In an attempt to discuss the origin of the Benin people, the author critically analyze the political organization of the Benin people. According to him, Benin kingdom has witnessed the rise and fall of great kings and monarchs who have ruled the kingdom. He went further to analyze the sophisticated level of civilization that the ancient Benin Kingdom experience to the extent that they even had an ambassador in Portugal. Nevertheless, nothing was said about godfatherism and electoral process in Edo State. This is as a result of the time frame of the author’s work which did not cover the colonial and postcolonial period of Edo State. Therefore, this research work will fill this gap by structurally analyzing postcolonial political organization in Edo State and as well as discuss the role of godfathers in the political development of the state.³³

In as much as we agree that these contributions and views have their own merits towards understanding godfatherism and democracy in Nigerian politics, we must also agree that they have not been able to give a total study of the nature of godfatherism and moreso on the 2020 governorship election in Edo State in the Nigerian political system. All the books, articles and theses reviewed have been able to cover only some parts of my research. Therefore, this proves to a reasonable extent that a proper study has not been carried out on godfatherism in Nigerian politics precisely pointing to the 2020 2020 governorship election in Edo state.

Thus, this work tries to fill this gap by providing details about the 2020 governorship election in Edo state while trying to analyze godfatherism in present day politics. The idea of good governance and eradication of godfatherism in Nigeria politics is one that the government and the people of Nigeria must see from a holistic point of view. This means that Nigerians must begin to improve on the affairs of the nation by allowing the people to take decisions.

CHAPTERIZATION

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO STUDY

This chapter presents a general background to this research work. It covers the introduction to the work as a well fundamental information on Godfatherism in Nigeria politics. It also discusses the aims and objectives, scope of study, methodology, literature review and chapterization of the work.

CHAPTER TWO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDO STATE: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDO STATE BEFORE 2020

This chapter presents the history, origin and political development of Godfatherism in Nigerian politics. It gives a clear understanding of what Godfatherism entails.

CHAPTER THREE: 2016 – 2020 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN EDO STATE 2020 ELECTION AND THE ROLES OF GODFATHERISM.

This chapter examines the role Godfatherism in 2016 – 2020 governorship election. The chapter seeks or went on to reveal the impact of the Godfatherism in Nigeria politics.

CHAPTER FOUR: ASSESSMENT AND FUTURE OF GODFATHERISM IN EDO STATE.

This chapter examines and assesses the future of Godfatherism in Edo State political structure. It also discusses the effects and impacts of Godfatherism in Edo State politics.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This chapter deals with the concluding part of the research work.

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CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF HISTORY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDO STATE

BEFORE 2020

Introduction

This chapter examines the brief history of Edo State. To properly understand the concept of godfatherism in Edo state, one must first unravel the environment which means providing an account on political structure of people of Edo State before 2020. Nigeria is made up of 36 states with Abuja the capital. These states are spread among the major geographical representation of ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria.¹ The major ethnic groups are, Igbo heavily represented in the East, the Hausa occupying the Northern part of Nigeria and finally the Yoruba spreading evenly in the Western part of the country.² The South-south region is a conglomeration of different tribes who migrated from areas occupied by the major ethnic groups in Nigeria.³ One of such state in the South-south is Edo state with eighteen local government areas: such as Akoko-Edo, Egor, Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-East, Esan West, Etsako Central, Etsako East, Etsako West, Igueben, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Ovia North-East, Ovia South-West, Owan East, Owan West and Uhumwonde.⁴ The people of Edo State have developed sophisticated political structure which has transformed the state over the years into what it is today.

Brief History of Edo State

Edo state was created out of former Bendel State on August 27, 1991, by the General Ibrahim Babangida. Edo State is located in the southern part of Nigeria. It is bounded by Kogi State to the northeast, Anambra to the east, Delta to the southeast, and Ondo to the west.⁵ Edo State lies at elevations between 500 feet (150m) in the South and more than 1800 feet (550m) in the North and the environment of Edo is covered mainly by rain forest. It has an area of 2,706 km² and a population of 4,777,000 as at October, 2023 census, thus making it the 24th most populous state in Nigeria.⁶ Its geographical location has made it a transiting town connecting the North and the South which has promoted trade and other business in the environment.⁷ The climate condition in Edo just like every other parts of Nigeria is the wet season and the dry season, the wet season which starts around April and last till the end of September, it is within this period that most farming activity takes place.⁸ While the dry season starts from October down to early part of April.⁹

MAP OF EDO STATE SHOWING THE 18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS



Source: uploaded by Jacob, Odeh Ehiorobo (www.nigerianmuse.com)

The Edo people are sometimes referred to as the Bini people and they are an Edoid speaking ethnic group who predominantly reside in seven local government area of Edo State. They are the descendants of the founders of the Benin Kingdom. They are closely related to other ethnic groups that speak Edoid language such as the Esan, Etsako, Isoko and the Urhobo. The name, Benin was coined by the Portuguese from the word "Ubini", which came into use during the reign of Oba Ewuare in 1440. Ubini is a Yoruba word meaning Vexation, used by Prince Oranmiyan, son of the wealthy ruler of Uhe (Ife) to describe the frustration he encountered after he was invited to rule Benin. *Ubini* was later corrupted to *Bini* by the mixed ethnicities living

together at the centre and further corrupted to *Benin* around 1485 when the Portuguese began trade relations with Oba Ewuare giving them coral beads.¹⁰

Political Development of Edo State Before 2020

In an attempt to discuss political development of Edo State, an exposition will be made on the history of Edo State starting from the precolonial times.¹¹ Edo State was originally part of the old Bendel State before it was created as a state on August 27, 1991 when the military government of Nigeria at the time decided to restructure and decentralize governance.¹² However, the history of the land goes back much further, with archaeological evidence suggesting human occupation as far back as 9000 BC.¹⁴ Before colonization, the area that now comprises Edo State was home to the Edo people, who are ethnic groups in Nigeria.¹³ The Edo people developed a sophisticated political system, with the Oba (king) as the central authority.¹⁴ The ancient Benin Kingdom, with its capital in Benin City, was a powerful state that flourished from the 12th to the 19th century.¹⁵ It was known for its expansive trade networks, artistic achievements, and military strength. During the scramble for Africa by European powers, the British Empire established a presence in the late 19th century.¹⁶ In 1897, the British launched a punitive expedition against the Benin Kingdom, leading to its annexation and the exile of the Oba.¹⁷ The British colonial administration subsequently incorporated the area into the southern protectorate. Under colonial rule, the Edo people were part of the larger political entity known as

Nigeria.¹⁸ However, they actively preserved their traditions and cultural practices, including the monarchy.¹⁹

With the attainment of independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria embarked on its journey as a sovereign nation.²⁰ Edo State, then part of the Mid-Western Region, joined the federation as one of the twelve states that comprised Nigeria.²¹ The political landscape of Edo State continued to evolve over the years, as Nigeria experienced periods of military rule and moments of democratic governance. From 1966 to 1999, Nigeria was ruled by a series of military regimes, which impacted the political development of Edo State.²² However, in 1999, Nigeria transitioned to democracy, and this ushered in a new era for Edo State.²³

Democratic Rule 1999 – 2020

Nigeria got back on the democratic rule after a long period of military rule in the country that witnessed the repression of freedom fighters and the civil society.²⁴ Unfortunately, Edo people did not get a better deal because their best sons and daughters, especially those who were at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement that pushed out the military did not take over power.²⁵ So the people of Edo State had to endure the maladministration of Governor Lucky Igbenedion for eight years. There was little to show in terms of infrastructural development of the state.²⁶ Things were so bad that the Governor's father would say that it was customary for failed students to repeat their classes, so his son should be obliged.²⁷ At the end of it all, the Governor

Lucky Igbinedion was convicted for looting the state and would enter into plea-bargaining to regain freedom.²⁸

One may think that the people of Edo State were getting it right again after Governor Lucky left office and Prof. Osariemen Osunbor took over 2007. The tenure of Osunbor was short lived as the judiciary on 11th of November 2008 awarded Osariemen Osunbor's victory to Adams Oshiomhole, a former President of the Nigerian Labour Congress who along with Pascal Bafyau worked hand in gloves with the dictatorial regime of General Ibrahim Babangida while noble Edo sons and daughters were ranged against military thus leading to a continuation of underdevelopment in Edo State.²⁹ Adams Oshomhole's eight years administration did not achieve much concrete developmental goal.³⁰ In fact, Oshiomhole's greatest legacy in the state was indebtedness, uncompleted projects, poorly executed projects, and so on. In his obsession with power, he sought to divide the Edo people.³¹ In his sinister calculations, he forgot that Edo people have a common ancestry and history.³² He played the Edo South against Edo Central as well as Edo North as a sustaining logic in power.³³ He took his tyranny to the height that one have to be loyal to feel the dividends of democracy.³⁴ At the time he left office, Edo State became the fourth most indebted state in the country trailing behind Lagos, Rivers and Kaduna states.³⁵

On Adams Oshiomhole's completion of his tenure in 2016, he imposed Governor Godwin Obaseki on Edo people, although Obaseki was not quite known to

Edo people.³⁶ Oshiomhole's intention was to use Obaseki to cover the huge debt he incurred while in office. Oshiomhole needed a technocrat who could manage the debt.³⁷ Like most godfathers, Oshiomhole wanted to control the incumbent from his office in Abuja of the All Progressive Congress. Governor Obaseki elected by the people begged to be independent and when his godfather refused Obaseki decided to resist Oshiomhole's meddlesomeness in his administration.³⁸ A disappointed Oshiomhole, therefore, resolved to thwart Obaseki's bid for a second term in office.³⁹ He went back to his vomit to frontline Pastor Ize-Iyamu, whom he had earlier denigrated. Oshiomhole's plan was to impose Ize-Iyamu on the state at the end of the 2020 election, thus he started to build structures to edge off the incumbent in the party primaries.⁴⁰

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CHAPTER THREE
2016-2020 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION AND THE ROLE OF
GODFATHERISM

Introduction to the Role of Godfatherism in 2016 – 2020 Edo State Governorship Election

One of the major features of democracy is people's involvement in decision making. This singular feature has created room for the establishment of political party where people with common interest come together to seek the support of the people towards achieving their political goals.¹ In Nigeria, electing leaders into office comes up after every four years and an existing holder of any government office has the privilege of two terms.² For instance, the governor of any state in Nigeria has the opportunity to be elected twice into office. However, electing people into power since the introduction of the fourth republic has been the solemn decision of godfathers instead of the people.³ This is exactly what played out during the 2016-2020 governorship election in Edo State. Hence, this chapter will explore the Edo State 2016-2020 election as well as provide detailed account on the role of godfathers in the political development of Edo State.⁴

Governorship Election in Edo State, 2016-2020

The 2016 election held on 28 September in Edo State with the lunch of Governor Godwin Baseki as the governor of Edo State.⁵ Be that as it may, the process that brought Obaseki into power goes way back into Adams Oshiomhole's regime. Obaseki was the head of Oshiomhole's economic team during his tenure.⁶ Thus the relationship established made Oshiomhole who was not in the group of those fighting for the party ticket in the build-up to 2016 to single-handedly made Godwin Obaseki the flag bearer of the party against many odds.⁷ Obaseki faced serious challenges at the primary election from the former deputy governor, Dr. Pius Odubu, Osarodion Ogie, former minister of works, Engr.⁸ Chris Ogienwonyi, Gen. Charles Airhiavbere, and Kenneth Imasuagbon, among others.⁹ Many party chieftains also rejected Obaseki because he was perceived to be someone who might not bend to their whim and caprices.¹⁰ However, Oshiomhole used his power as the state governor and his oratory skill to arm-twist party chieftains.¹¹ Some of the contestants eventually stepped down and supported his preferred candidate.¹² In line with Oshiomhole's permutation, Obaseki emerged the candidate of the APC and defeated the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu, at the poll.¹³ Hence, the success of Obaseki's political career can be attributed to the role of godfatherism played by Oshiomhole.¹⁴

However, as soon as Obaseki was sworn-in as the governor, he introduced new rules and regulations on access to the Government House.¹⁵ The new rules banned politicians who have no business at the Osadebe house, making a place that hitherto was a Mecca of sorts for politicians during Oshiomole's administration to suddenly turn to a no-go area.¹⁶ According to Peter Aligbe, Obaseki told the party chieftains and foot soldiers of Oshiomhole that he remained a technocrat who believed that the allocation to the state and its internally-generated revenue were meant for the development of the state, and not for sharing among politicians.¹⁷ Among the politicians and foot-soldiers and political aides of Oshiomhole who fell to the new order, was ex-youth leader of the party, Osakpamwan Eriyo, who was remanded in prison for three months.¹⁸ Tony Kabaka, who was seen as the leader of the youth in the state, was not spared in the new order, as he was removed as revenue collector on behalf of the state government.¹⁹ The development angered Oshiomhole as most of the party chieftains continued to flood his house to seek assistance instead of meeting the governor to take care of them.²⁰

Also, the governor's alleged refusal to put the newly-commissioned Central Hospital to use for almost three years after commissioning is another major offense committed by Obaseki. Despite Obaseki's unhappiness that Oshiomhole still dictates the pace, he maintained silence with the hope that when his master Oshiomhole becomes the APC national chairman, he would face national politics.²¹ Based on this

belief, Obaseki supported Oshiomhole against his tribal man, John Odigie-Oyegun, who was seeking a second term.²² Nevertheless, the rift between Obaseki and Oshiomhole prompted Oshiomhole to ask some of his associates, including Odubu, retired general Airhiavbere, and Ogiewonyi to be warming up for the primary election as possible replacement even though Obaseki and his godfather kept denning the conflict existing between them.²³ Oshiomhole confidence was drawn from the fact that he is a godfather and his political position as a godfather can help him do and undo in the political arena of Edo State.²⁴

2020 Election and the Role of Godfatherism in Edo State

The political tussles between godfather Adams Oshiomhole and godson Obaseki Godwin was the precedence that built up to the 2020 gubernatorial election in Edo State.²⁵ Oshiomhole who was unhappy about the political decisions of Obaseki started making efforts to displace Obaseki in the coming primary election.²⁶ First, Oshiomhole wanted to make sure that his loyalist floods the Edo State House of Assembly in order to frustrate Obaseki second term ambition.²⁷ A clear example of the cold war unfolded in Akoko-Edo Federal Constituency, where the former Speaker of the House of Assembly, Kabir Adjoto, hails from. Oshiomhole wanted Peter Akpatason, while Governor Obaseki was favourably disposed to the assembly speaker.²⁸ But in the end, Akpatason got the ticket.²⁹ The same scenario played out in Oredo Federal Constituency, where Oshiomhole wanted Osaro Obazee, while Obaseki

preferred Osaigbovo Iyokha.³⁰ In the end, Iyokha secured the ticket, while Obazee got the state assembly ticket.³¹ There are 24 members-elect in the assembly.³² Out of this number, 19 members-elect were said to be loyal to Oshiomhole, while the remaining six were loyal to Obaseki.³³ The situation got worse to the point that the tussle over who will produce candidates in the state assembly resulted in the cancellation of the initial primary election organized by the national body of the party.³⁴ A fresh one was conducted. The removal of former speaker of Edo State Assembly, Alhaji Adjoto, and his replacement with Victor Egoro, who was his deputy was linked to the raging war between the two political titans.³⁵

In this respect, Odigie Benjamin noted that the crisis rocking Edo State arose from the actions of a godfather trying to overheat the polity.³⁶ Ask anybody from Edo state, what is Obaseki's biggest distraction and they will tell you that his distraction is not whether he has governed well or not, but from his immediate predecessor, Adams Oshiomhole. Agbududmeh Richard added that it is very unfortunate, especially considering the fact that Oshiomhole is the national chairman of the same party with the governor.³⁷ It has never been heard that PDP or Edo people want to remove Obaseki. What has been trending is how his predecessor who happens to be the party chairman and the governor's godfather does not want him back in the office.³⁸

With the shaky situation in APC, Obaseki knew his chances of becoming governor is slim as he cannot defeat the candidate of his godfather in APC primaries.³⁹

Hence Obaseki deflected to People's Democratic Party (PDP).⁴⁰ This decision set the stage for a highly contested election.⁴¹ The major contenders in the 2020 election were Godwin Obaseki, now representing the PDP, and Osagie Ize-Iyamu, who remained with the APC.⁴² The campaigns leading up to the election were marked by intense competition, with both candidates showcasing their achievements and presenting their plans for the development of Edo state.⁴³ On September 19, 2020, the 2020 Edo State gubernatorial election held, and after an intense battle at the polls, Godwin Obaseki emerged as the winner for a second term.⁴⁴ He garnered a substantial number of votes, securing his position as Governor of Edo state until 2024.⁴⁵ Obaseki's victory in the 2020 election was a significant endorsement by the people of Edo state and reflected their confidence in his leadership and vision for the state.⁴⁶ It also highlighted the dynamic nature of politics and the ability of political actors to adapt and seek alternative platforms to achieve their ambitions.⁴⁷ According to Chima Obiakpo, many people were unhappy with Obaseki because he was working for the ordinary people of Edo.⁴⁸ The people remained his priority despite the fact that some people wanted him to do otherwise. I will use the money to serve the people, because governance is about the people.⁴⁹ The 2020 Edo state election showcased both the pervasive influence of godfatherism and the growing resolve among political actors and the electorate to challenge its dominance. The triumph of Governor Godwin Obaseki demonstrated that a resilient and determined candidate, who seeks to break free from the clutches of godfatherism, can successfully navigate the complex political terrain and secure

popular support. This election stands as a significant juncture in the ongoing struggle for democratization in provides vital insights for future electoral processes.

During the course of this governorship election campaigns, a slogan was coined by the people “4 + 4 *Togba*” (It must be complete) and “*Ogba ne*” (it is complete) meaning the second tenor of Governor Obaseki will be completed with or without a godfather showing that masses where tired of the godfathers having a say in the political affairs of Edo State.⁵⁰

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CHAPTER FOUR
CHALLENGES OF GODFATHERISM: ASSESSMENT OF GODFATHERISM
IN EDO STATE

It has become almost impossible in Nigeria for one to hold a political office in Nigeria without the influence of a powerful force behind such a person for their power, money, and influence.¹ Godfathers are generally defined as men or women who have the power and influence to personally determine both who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins in the election in the country as a whole.² Godfatherism is not just prevalent in Nigeria society, it is everywhere and has a different name in different societies and countries.³ Apparently, it appears that majority of state governors, senators, ministers are financed by such caliber of person and for those financed by their godfathers get into offices now have huge power in respective states.⁴ The word godfatherism has been affecting the political system and party arena since the country returned to a democratic state and has a negative reflection on the society, if a proper and right candidate is not elected to represent the citizens, such a society will lack the dividends of democracy and neglect why they vote, because most of the candidates who represent them are imposed by some elite in society.⁵ However, since returning to the democratic state, godfatherism has been playing a very crucial role in Nigeria politics to determine the candidate that is eligible to contest in an election and also to

win particular sit. Hence, there are several challenges posed by the concept of godfatherism in the political arena of Edo State and Nigeria as a whole.⁶

Challenges of Godfatherism

One of the challenges confronting godfatherism in Nigeria is lack of meritocracy.⁷ A significant challenge of godfatherism is the disregard for meritocracy in politics.⁸ When political positions and opportunities are controlled by a few influential individuals, it hampers fair competition. Godfathers often leverage their power and influence to manipulate the political landscape to their advantage. This can include influencing elections, appointing loyalists to key positions, and dictating party decisions, undermining the democratic process.⁹ Another challenge is Stifling of Independent Thinking.¹⁰ Godfatherism can stifle the growth of independent-thinking and innovative leaders. Those who challenge the established order or refuse to toe the line of the godfather risk being marginalized or ostracized within the political party.¹¹ Also Lack of Accountability is another challenge of godfatherism.¹² In a system where godfathers control political power, there is often a lack of accountability, as individuals may prioritize loyalty to their godfather over the welfare of the broader public. This can lead to corruption, nepotism, and the mismanagement of public resources.¹³ In addition Political Instability is another challenge posed by godfatherism: The dominance of godfatherism can contribute to political instability, as power struggles and conflicts among competing godfathers can disrupt governance and

hinder progress.¹⁴ This can create a cycle of dependence on the godfathers, perpetuating the cycle of control and stifling democratic growth.¹⁵

Assessment and Effect of Godfatherism in Edo State

In recent years, Edo State has witnessed a shift in the political dynamics, with efforts to challenge and break free from the grip of godfatherism.¹⁶ The 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State saw the emergence of strong and independent-minded leaders who challenged the influence of godfathers and secured electoral victories.¹⁷ This shift reflects the increasing awareness and desire for political autonomy and merit-based leadership among the people of Edo State.¹⁸ It also highlights the resilience of democracy and the willingness of citizens to challenge entrenched political systems that do not serve their best interests.¹⁹ The future godfatherism in Edo State will largely depend on the commitment of both the political leaders and civil society to uphold democratic values and promote good governance.²⁰ It requires continued efforts to consolidate power in the hands of the people and strengthen democratic institutions that ensure transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.²¹ It is essential to encourage active citizen participation, cultivate an educated and informed electorate, and establish robust electoral reforms that promote free and fair elections.²² By fostering a culture of democracy, meritocracy, and transparency, Edo State can pave the way for a future where godfatherism loses relevance, and the aspirations of the people take center stage in the political

landscape.²³ Be that as it may, there are certain steps to take to help enhance the future of godfatherism in Edo State:

One of such steps to take is changing political landscape.²⁴ The successful resistance of godfatherism in recent electoral cycles indicates a growing dissatisfaction among the populace with the dominance of a few influential individuals.²⁵ This signifies a shift towards a more inclusive and democratic political culture in Edo State.²⁶ Also, Strengthening Democratic Institutions: To fully eradicate godfatherism, it is crucial to strengthen the democratic institutions within the state.²⁷ This includes ensuring an independent judiciary, impartial electoral bodies, and robust checks and balances on the exercise of political power. Such reforms would create a level playing field for all candidates and foster a more accountable and transparent political system.²⁸ In addition, Grassroots Mobilization and Citizen Education is another step to take. Sustainable change requires the active engagement of the populace.²⁹ Encouraging grassroots mobilization and citizen education can empower individuals to make informed decisions in political processes, and hold leaders accountable.³⁰ Embracing Youth Involvement in politics. Engaging young people in the political process is crucial for the future of Edo State.³¹ Actively involving youth in decision-making, fostering their leadership skills, and creating opportunities for political participation can help break the cycle of godfatherism and inclusive political landscape.³²

Furthermore, Ethical Leadership and Anti-corruption Measures are some of the measure to help improve the future political arena of Edo State. Promoting ethical leadership and implementing anti-corruption measures are essential to counter the negative effects of godfatherism.³³ By encouraging transparent practices, accountability, and zero tolerance for corruption, Edo State can build a governance framework that is independent of godfather influence.³⁴ Continuous Vigilance is another useful step to consider. While progress has been made in challenging godfatherism in Edo State, it remains important to remain vigilant.³⁵ The influence of godfathers can reemerge in different forms or through new individuals. Continuous monitoring, vigilance, and commitment to democratic principles will help safeguard against the reemergence of such dynamics.³⁶

By addressing these points, Edo State can continue its journey towards a political landscape that is fair, inclusive, and free from the grip of godfatherism. It's a collective effort that requires the cooperation of political leaders, civil society, and the electorate to shape a more democratic and accountable future for the state.³⁷

Godfatherism doesn't bring about good governance as there is personal interest first before anything and disunity among politicians. Loyalty to the godfather and poor representation of the people and this affect the state because it brings negative political decisions on policies and implementations causing slow decision making.³⁸

Endnotes

1. Interview with Franklin Arayomi, 54 years, Male, civil Servant, Benin City, 27 May, 2023.
2. Interview with Franklin Arayomi, 54 years, Male, civil Servant, Benin City, 27 May, 2023.
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9. Interview with Victor Agbudumhe, 50 years, Male, Civil Servant, Auchi, 27 June, 2023.
10. Interview with Marvelous Christian, 49 years, male, civil servant, Abuja, 25 June, 2023.
11. Interview with Marvelous Christian, 49 years, male, civil servant, Abuja, 25 June, 2023.
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20. Interview with Peter Aligbe, 49 years, Male, Civil Servant, Benin, 30 July, 2023.
21. Interview with Peter Aligbe, 49 years, Male, Civil Servant, Benin, 30 July, 2023.
22. Interview with Peter Aligbe, 49 years, Male, Civil Servant, Benin, 30 July, 2023.
23. Interview with Onomeh Charles, 55 years, Male, Civil Servant, Benin, 10 June, 2023.
24. Interview with Onomeh Charles, 55 years, Male, Civil Servant, Benin, 10 June, 2023.
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29. Interview with Mr. Friday Akosa, 56 years, Male, Politician, Benin, 15 August, 2023.
30. Interview with Mr. Friday Akosa, 56 years, Male, Politician, Benin, 15 August, 2023.
31. Interview with Mr. Friday Akosa, 56 years, Male, Politician, Benin, 15 August, 2023.
32. Interview with Pastor Sunny Ekiuwa, 61 years, Male, Clergy, Benin, 14 August, 2023.
33. Interview with Pastor Sunny Ekiuwa, 61 years, Male, Clergy, Benin, 14 August, 2023.
34. Interview with Pastor Sunny Ekiuwa, 61 years, Male, Clergy, Benin, 14 August, 2023.
35. Interview with Friday Bartholomew Ogunretin, 40 years, Male, Doctorate Candidate, Benin, 19 September, 2023.
36. Interview with Friday Bartholomew Ogunretin, 40 years, Male, Doctorate Candidate, Benin, 19 September, 2023.
37. Interview with Friday Bartholomew Ogunretin, 40 years, Male, Doctorate Candidate, Benin, 19 September, 2023.
38. Interview with Friday Bartholomew Ogunretin, 40 years, Male, Doctorate Candidate, Benin, 19 September, 2023.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigerian politics, with focus on the 2020 Governorship election in Edo State. Godfatherism, characterized by the dominance of few influential individuals in political decision-making processes, has long been a prominent feature in Nigerian politics. The analysis of the 2020 governorship election in Edo State revealed a significant shift in the political landscape, with the emergence of a strong and independent-minded leader who successfully challenged the influence of godfathers and secured a decisive electoral victory. This outcome signifies an evolving political culture in Nigeria, where voters are increasingly emphasizing meritocracy, good governance, and the empowerment of the people. The study has highlighted several challenges associated with godfatherism in Nigerian politics, such as the lack of meritocracy, misuse of power, stifling of independent thinking, lack of accountability, and political instability. These challenges have hindered the sustenance of democratic principles and prevented the realization of a level playing field for political competition. However, findings from the 2020 Governorship election in Edo State have demonstrated the potential for change and reform. The successful resistance against godfather influence indicates a growing awareness among the electorate of the detrimental effects of godfatherism on democratic governance and the aspirations of the people.

To accelerate the transformation away from godfatherism in Nigerian politics, several strategies. It is believe that strengthening democratic institutions, empowering political parties to promote internal democracy and autonomy, grassroots mobilization and citizen education, embracing youth involvement, promoting ethical leadership, and continuous vigilance were identified as key areas for progress. The 2020 Governorship election in Edo State as a significant turning point in Nigerian politics. The election served as a catalyst for a paradigm shift, signaling the rejection of the dominance of godfatherism of a more democratic and inclusive political system. The victory of the independent-minded leader reflected the will of the people, who demonstrated their desire for change and their commitment to the principles of participatory democracy. The election revealed the power of collective action and the ability of the electorate to challenge entrenched power structures. Furthermore, the 2020 Governorship election in Edo State provided valuable insights into the strategies and tactics employed by the electables to overcome the influence of godfathers. The successful resistance demonstrated the importance of building strong alliances among like-minded political actors, fostering grassroots mobilization, and engaging in effective voter education campaigns. These approaches empowered the electorate and created a platform for collective action against godfatherism. This study also underscored the significance of political leadership in driving change and reform. The independent-minded leader who emerged victorious in the election demonstrated the qualities of ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability that resonated with the

electorate. This study provided an important lesson and highlighted the importance of cultivating a new breed of politicians who prioritize the interests of the people over personal gain or external influences. The findings of the study have significant implications for Nigerian politics as a whole. It reaffirm the aspirations of Nigerians for a political system that values meritocracy, fairness, and inclusivity. It also serves as a call to action for policymakers, civil society organizations, and the electorate to continue advocating for democratic reforms and actively participate in the political process.

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Agbududmeh Richard	Trader	Male	42	Phone Interview	13 August 2023
Chima Obiakpo	Retired Civil Servant	Male	68	Benin City	13 August 2023
Emmanuel Abaivbugue	Civil Servant	Male	45	Phone Interview	4 May 2023
Franklin Arayomi	Civil Servant	Male	54	Benin City	27 May, 2023.
Friday Bartholomew Ogunretin	Doctorate Candidate	Male	40	Benin City	19 September 2023
Iliasu David	Retired Civic Servant	Male	72	Benin City	30 July 2023
Lucky Iboi	Civil Servant	Male	58	Benin City	13 May 2023
Magret Odeke	Banker	Female	38	Phone Interview	13 August 2023
Marvelous Christian	Civil Servant	Male	49	Phone Interview	25 June
Friday Akosa	Politician	Male	56	Benin City	15 August 2023
Odigie Benjamin	Trader	Male	65	Benin City	13 August 2023
Onomeh Charles	Civil Servant	Male	55	Benin City	10 June 2023
Osamudiameh Peterson	Civil Servant	Male	59	Benin City	19 June 2023
Sunny Ekiuwa	Pastor	Male	61	Benin City	14 August 2023
Peter Aligbe	Civil Servant	Male	49	Benin City	30 July 2023
Victor Agbudumhe	Civil Servant	Male	50	Phone Interview	27 June 2023

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