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The Implication of Godfatherism in the Appointments of Heads of LGC and Democratic Consolidation in Kogi State

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ABSTRACT

Politicization has not brought about any significant development economically, socially, and politically. This research aims to assess the politicization of heads of LGC in Kogi State with reference to Dekina with emphasis on the recurrent issues. The systematic technique was used to draw 100 interview respondents and data obtained was analyzed descriptively via content analysis. Findings among others reveal that; the politicization of heads of LGC in Kogi State, in particular, is conceived as support towards an economic investment that must produce enormous dividend at all means. Inexperience, not-qualify, and visionless candidates are imposed by State governors (godfathers) for administrative and total control of the political system, has been manipulated to serve their whims and caprices to enhance their enrichment by looting government funds detriment of the governed. This negative practice of politicization (godfatherism) is a big termite eating deep into the political development of Kogi politics not until the electoral process produces a leader with a conscience with the love of the state at heart that will consider the welfare and wellbeing of the govern paramount, political stability and democratic development will not be achievable.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy all over the world has been adjudged the best form of government because it is a notion that is seen as being synonymous with the popular representative with respect to representative government through the election, election based on party basis, constitutionalism, and constitutional document. It defines powers responsibility/functions, procedures, etc. here, all citizens are assumed to have certain alienable rights which are usually guaranteed in the constitution. According to Avidime and Obi (2018), every citizen according to the Nigerian constitution should have the right to freedom of association, expression, and religion. Citizens' rights amongst others also cover the right to human life and dignity. Scholars like Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, and some philosophers of the classical school of thought espoused how political

powers are in the hands of few political elites in the early Greek and Roman society. In addition, the abuse of power domination by the political elites was highly kicked against by philosophers like Pareto, Mosca, Michaels, and Marx in their political analysis in varying political elite contexts.

The cultures of power domination by few elites in the society tend to abuse the due procedures for free and fair elections and this negative political practice is still gaining a robust pedigree. In other to under the negative impact of bad electoral malpractice, studies on political elite and leadership are very important since it underlies the trajectories of ideal sustainable development devoid of bad leadership and electoral malpractices. The present democratic electoral processes in a democratic country like Nigeria have been corrupted by the concept and ill practice of

godfatherism. It explains a situation where a rich political elite supports a candidate of their choice and ensures that such candidate wins an election at all costs using his wealth, political influence, and support of his like-minded allies (Joseph, 2015).

Consequently, godfatherism has greatly undermined even the supposed judicious allocation of national resources for national development. Political elites tend to only concentrate on national resources and development to just a few areas of their personal interest. This unfair practice also takes the form of religions and ethnic lines to which the rich political elites belong to. This is demonstrated in the appointment of people of the same religious belief to top official positions.

The history of political godfatherism is traceable to the colonial epoch through the independence era, military interregnum, and towards the restoration of democracy in Nigeria which started due to the nationalists' 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 idolized 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.

In Nigeria, since the return to democracy after the era of General Abdulsalami Abubakar on 29th May 1999 though very short, there have been too many to mention but few occasions of electoral violence either before, during and after elections in Nigeria. There have been a series of electoral fraud ranging from falsification of result sheets to snatching of ballot boxes and large corruption through money politicking, vote-buying cum sellin. Similarly, Kogi State is not farfetched from these scenarios under the administration of Alhaji Ichala Wada of which the heads of LGA were politicized and LGA elections were not conducted but were

rather politicized based on endorsement by elite political godfathers which affect the free and fair democratic process.

It is very worrisome to state and reemphasizes that godfathers do not allow free and fair participation by eligible voters in as much as you are not their loyalist and all these perilous activities do not have a bright future for Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

METHODS

This work investigates the politicization of the appointment of Heads of Local Government Areas in Kogi State with reference to Dekina LGA through the period of 2012-2015. According to Mbamara (2004), godfatherism has done so much more harm than good. It has enthroned selfishness, subjugation, and suppression of the electorates. This act is akin to political slave trading which political elites only ensure that their candidate wins the election at all cost. The expectation from sponsored candidates by political godfathers is to expect monetary returns. This scenario has caused political intolerance in the Nigerian democracy and always tends to result in chaotic situations whereby the "political sons" failed to patronize their godfathers while in office not for any long period. The democratic process in Nigeria is determined by a few elites who impose candidates on the people and ensures that they employ very means available for their candidates to win the election with the view of having monetary returns at the end of the day which manifested itself in Kogi state Politics from the imposition of gubernatorial candidate Ichala Wada (godson) by the then Governor of Kogi State, Alhaji Ibrahim Idris (godfather). The administration of Ichala Wada imposed Liaison officers 1, 2 and 3 championed by Muhammed Alih who was the then Chairman (Dekina Youth Initiative, 2017). This scenario has caused political intolerance in the Nigerian democracy and always tends to result in violence before, during, and after elections in Nigeria due to electoral malpractice and at some point when "god-son" refuses their continued loyalty to their "godfathers".

All the sell political practices have made good governance an impossible aspiration in Nigeria. It has hampered significant economic growth and development. The social life of the people is negatively affected where there is no trust for one

another. The principle of the rule of law and separation of powers has been a “wish list functional principle”. Human rights seem to now belong to a few people and not for all. This is so true because the courts and agents of the judiciary have been bought over by the rich political elites whose decisions are only obeyed instead of the jurists obeying the dictates of the constitutional law. It is from the above analysis that this work is posed at assessing godfatherism in Local Government Chairman Politicization in Kogi State with focus on Dekina Local Government Area to ascertain the reason for the politicization of Heads of Dekina LGA under Alhaji Ichala Wada Administration from 2012-2015, the effect of politicization of heads of LGA on Kogi State democratic process, to ascertain also the relationship between godfatherism and the poor/failing democracy in Kogi State and to determine the possible solutions to the politicization of Heads of Local Government Area LGA in Kogi State.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Heads of Dekina LGA Politicized under Alhaji Ichala Wada Administration from 2012-2015

All of the informants indicated that before the Wada administration Head of Dekina Local government council was elected and not appointed as enshrined in the constitution because it is the third tier of government closer to the people. The elective process makes the democratic process participatory because the people see it as their own government and they elect their sons and daughters to the various position of leadership for the development and it helps them to choose the most qualified, accessible, transparent, and accountable person they can trust for the leadership position. This has helped in monitoring various leaders that emerged and have helped in fostering rural development. For example, Ikani Okolo was two times elected Dekina local government council Chairman because he is a well-known and trusted son that has passion and political will for development. And during his regime under Alhaji Ibrahim Idris Dekina LG enjoyed rural industrialization like full payment civil servant salaries, revitalization of Primary health care centers (PHC) in Dekina, Anyigba, Abocho, Egume, and Renovations of primary and secondary schools, scholarship grants to students, market

women empowerment construction of roads among others. He was able to do all this because he was elected and he knows he is accountable to the people if he has to succeed in his political career.

But the coming of Ichala Wada administration truncated the democratic exercise in Dekina LGA and deprived us of our right of voting and be voted. We don't even know who is appointed as liaison officer nor administrator, who he is and where he came from, no developmental project in any council ward of Dekina LGA, we are just here knowing nothing concerning our local government. As a matter of fact, Local government councils Heads in Kogi state were hijacked by the Wada administration. For example, in Dekina LGC, there was Wada imposition of L. I (Liaison Officers) 1, 2, and 3 championed by Muhammed Alih as Chairperson and Usman Idah Paddy against the public mandate. This scenario has caused political intolerance in the LGC democracy and always tends to result in poor performance of these imposed “Heads” it has now become a menace pulling down the foundation of masses-driven governance, thereby denying us of our much-deserved dividends of democracy. “We don't know anything about Chairmanship election Dekina LGC, what we have is politics of Godfatherism” (Interview Respondents, 2019).

These findings are consistent with Richard Joseph's (2016) in his work prebendal politics where he argued that politics of clientelism (Godfatherism) has characterized Nigeria's democratic experiment over the years and has indeed affected political participation as a result of the imposition of public officials against the will of the people, which clearly explains the scenario in Kogi state politics and Dekina in particular. The findings also agree with Obi, (2016) finding in his work titled the role of local government in rural development in Patigi LGC in Kwara where he argued that work many LGC has underperformed and has not justified the purpose of their creation because of the leadership structure which sees itself as accountable only to the power that brought him to power rather than fostering rural development.

Investigating into the reason for appointing administrators or liaison officers rather than conducting to project the best candidate. The majority of the informant posit that appointment of Head of Local Government Council rather than

election is attributed to 3 reasons which are constitutional, political, and economic factors. On the constitutional factor; there is no clear-cut autonomy of LGCs over the country. It only existed in theory as the third tier of government which makes it a tool of the political expression of state governors. The 10% from federal and 5% statutory grant or allocation is just a theoretical expression as the said money is allocated to state government confers due to the dependent nature of LGC. This is why most times local government councils perform below expectation due to constant interference of higher power.

This finding agrees with (Adebayo, 2014; Obi, 2016 and Kolo, 2017) who argued that the problem confronting local government autonomy in Nigeria's fourth republic is the problem of State interference in the functions and affairs of the local governments. This problem seems to be common nationwide and it results in a lack of continuity in government and also governmental programs and projects one government by many succeeding governments. This leads to economic and mental wastage as well as the retrogression of development. Many local government areas in the country are without elected representatives. Rather, what is in place in these councils are caretaker committees appointed by the State governors. Although the caretaker committee system of local government is not mentioned in the constitution, the system has remained common in the history and evolution of local government in Nigeria.

Consequently, exploring the political factors responsible for politicization of LGC Heads in Dekina, all informants claimed: "elections are not conducted in Dekina because of the political interest of state governor and he wants his loyalist to be at the helm of affairs for administrative convenience. For example, Ikani Okolo the then Dekina LGC Head aligned with Late Prince Abubakar Audu during the governorship race in 2007 between Action Congress (AG) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which was considered as a political betrayal by the governor. This was possible because Ikani Okolo enjoyed some degree of autonomy via election. So the emergence of Wada abolished election and result in the appointment not to experience such betrayal and for him to be in charge or control of all political activities in the state. This reason negates democratic tenet and has disenfranchised the

Dekina electorate of their civic duty and constitutional obligation of periodic electoral exercise, and has introduced gross nepotism and Godfatherism in Dekina political landscape"

This finding is in agreement with (Fund, 2008) who argued that just as elections are central to democracy and democratic governance so also is godfathers in understanding the politicization of heads of Dekina Local Government Chairperson or administrators or liaison officers, a crisis of internal democracy, imposition of candidates on the masses. Hence, when the processes and outcomes of elections in a democracy do not reflect the democratic traditions of popular sovereignty, free and fair elections, independent democratic institutions, and the observance of the principles of separation of powers or checks and balances, then godfatherism becomes evident, as election outcomes can be determined by anti-democratic practices including the forceful imposition of candidates, propaganda, violence, bribery, intimidation, use of thugs and security agencies to undermine the will of the people in electing their political leaders.

The multiplier implication of these findings is that without LGC autonomy in practice both financial and statutorily, State governments will continue to see themselves as demigods which LGC is nothing but a tool of watching the rural setting, and this development undermines democratic and electoral processes in the study area and promotes the politics of Patron-Clientelism vis-à-vis Godfatherism. These findings uphold the first research proposition of this study that the politicization of heads of LGC under Ichala Wada was for administrative convenience. This is because the appointment of administrators gives room for imposition of loyalties and submissive clients who only obey and takes directives without questioning, no wonder he consolidated on it throughout his administration.

The effect of Politicization of Heads of LGC have on the Kogi Democratic Process

All of the group interviews were of the opinion that the politicization of LGC Heads to great extent affects the Kogi democratic process. Because appointments of the leadership of LGC do not give room for participatory democracy, contributes to political apathy of the electorates, the masses no longer believe in Kogi electoral system and this

development is not in compliance with Nigeria electoral law.

According to the majority group interview: The politicization of the leadership structure of LGC in Dekina and Kogi at large has to a great extent undermined Kogi democratic process due to the imposition of leaders in public offices. Because no democracy without an election, so what we have in Kogi state as its concerns LGCs, not democracy but Autocratic and dictatorial government and most times has translated to retard development of the political system and resulting to violence, Politicized employment in the state cum the center, Disfranchisement of citizens to exercise their political right.

These findings disagree with the second research proposition that the politicization of heads of LGC has no impact on Kogi democratic process. This is because there is no democracy without an election, absence of election translate to despotic administration or dictatorial government, and when vital office like that of LGC Chairmanship is politicized to the level of appointment to whom the governor deems fit is total negation to democratic processes.

The Relationship between Godfatherism and the Failing Democracy in Dekina

According to all the interview respondents: If not politics of godfatherism, why then is an election not conducted in Dekina? It is no difference between appointment and godfatherism because a governor appoints someone who is submissive and loyal to you even if you are wrong in your decision. So politicization of LGC Heads is a product of godfatherism and it has contributed to failing democracy in Dekina and Kogi in general from Wada who sowed the seed down to Bello administration. For example, you cannot compare Ikani Benjamin Okolo who was elected by the people performance under Ibrahim Idris regime from 2003-2011, and Paddy appointed by Ichala Wada, because there sense of belonging that this is the government we must take charge of it so the rural people were determined to participate politically and Ikani performed developmental wise to a great extent. But the politics of godfatherism in Kogi state which has generated politicization of LGC Heads by the governor have a consequential effect on the entire political, social and economic system of the state and thus affects the state developmental-wise. This

means that godfatherism in Kogi politics is responsible for poor democracy in Kogi state.

These findings disagree with the third research proposition that godfatherism in Kogi politics is not responsible for failing democracy in Dekina democratic process, because public offices such as important one as Chairmanship of LGC which is the third tier of government and government closer to the people is compulsorily meant to occupy via election and not appointment as statutory obligation provided by the constitution of the land even in "theory". And when such important offices are occupied via politics of godfatherism (appointment rather the selection) then the democratic process has been eroded or truncated.

Nexus between Godfatherism and Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation

The rise of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic (1999-2019) posed a significant threat to democratic dividends as well as socio-economic development and the stability of good governance. One of the most disturbing and damaging effects of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic was the campaign for a truly free, fair, and credible electoral process in which electorates are expected to freely choose who governs them and represents their interests. Indeed, the privilege of electing people of their choice to govern them was denied due to situations in which godfathers imposed their preferred candidates on the general populace. This is, to say the least, diametrically opposed to the tenets of democratic rule (Chukwuemeka, 2012).

When the public office is not accountable to the people, who in any case did not vote in their election to public office, the loyalty of such public office is invariably titled towards their godfathers, which negates one of the critical attributes of governance and democracy, which is responsive and transparent government. This scenario is also harmful to good governance and political stability, which are based on the rule of law, due process, accountability, and transparency in the administration of public affairs. The emergence of godfatherism has also deprived citizens of the right to enjoy the dividends of democratic governance in the sense that the government has become hesitant to initiate and implement policies that would advance the well-being of the citizens.

This was since godfatherism in Nigeria was primarily predatory. The primary motivation for

entering politics stemmed from a desire to obtain wealth (money) from the government coffers over which their godsons wielded power (Chukwuemeka, 2012). As a result, the financial resources accruable to the state from the federation account and intended for the improvement of citizens' living standards were of paramount importance to them. Hell will erupt if godsons refuse to settle their godfathers as agreed. The experiences recorded in Abakaliki Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, between the former Chairman, Hon. Emma Uguru and Mr. Matthew Uguru (Incumbent), 2007 – 2011, Senator Rashidi Ladoja of Oyo State and Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu between 2003 and 2007, Alhaji Olusola Saraki and Rtd Navy Commodore Mohammed Lawal between 2003 – 2007, and Chief Chris Uba and Dr. Chris Ngige between 2003 – 2006 were awful and devastating (Joseph, Ibeogu & Nwankwo, 2014).

The end result and consequences of these (godfatherism) in our policy are that economic activities, particularly in education, health, security (political wrangling), agriculture, housing, and infrastructure development, are halted. According to the findings of this study, political godfatherism has hampered good governance in Nigeria. Revenue allocated to these states and councils is frequently mismanaged, with unjustified and ridiculous amounts of contracts awarded to godfathers and other political associates (Oluloyo, 2014) in various disguises for fear of being removed from office. Some are paid monthly allowances from the state purse for jobs that are not completed, all to appease godfathers at the expense of the people.

The study also reveals that the godfather is to blame for Nigeria's poor democratic institutions. The findings are consistent with the work of Akinola (2009), Korikye & Wonibowei (2011), and Attah, Audu, & Haruna (2014), who added that political godfatherism is based on political surrogacy involving financial and moral assistance, with the godfather being the major donor and the godson being the primary receiver, resulting in the masses being undermined with no dividend of democracy. Meanwhile, Godfather has jeopardized Nigeria's fledgling democratic experiment. For example, the unconstitutional removal of Oyo State Governor Ladoja in 2006 may have resulted in political instability in the state.

This has demonstrated that democracy in Nigeria has not been fully institutionalized, and the phenomenon of godfatherism has jeopardized the democratic process as well as the socio-economic lives of the citizenry. Political godfatherism is a syndrome in our political process that works against democratic institutions. To satisfy their selfish interests, they are willing to encroach on mafia dons, subjugating public office holders such as governors and council chairman to their dictates. These political gladiators' actions have prevented citizens from electing their preferred candidates as leaders. Political gladiators' responses can also be seen in the context of one preferring patronage over policy (Hyden, 2006). The occupant of politics is expected to use this office personally to maintain its political gladiators. The godfather depends on state resources as his contribution to the political success of a government leader thereby opposing democratic dividends. Godfathers involved in election malpractices, using security agents to intimidate the electorate during the election (Oluloyo, 2014).

Possible Solutions to Tackling the Problem of Politicization of LGC Heads godfatherism in Kogi State politics

According to the entire interview Respondents: To put an end to issues of politicization and godfatherism in Dekina LGC, LGC must be given financial autonomy and removed from state law and instituted by the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria to have feasible freedom to recruit and manage its own staff, raise and manage its own finance, make policies, laws and provide service within the limits of its resource and function without interference, and the issue of joint account should be removed totally when this is done it will eradicate the issue of politicization and godfatherism in Dekina LGC Political landscape (Interview Respondents, 2019)

This finding concurs with Bernard, (2009) thesis of eradicating politicization of public office via the instrument of godfatherism who argued to put an end to the political crisis created by political godfathers in Nigeria, such factors as; Political awareness campaigns should be put in place to put an end to political murders. Electoral positions in Nigeria should be made unappealing. The practice of paying elected public servants astronomical salaries and allowances should be abandoned.

Voting by electronic means should be adopted for all elections in the country to minimize electoral fraud. With all this said and hopefully put in place, democracy would have more meaning and be more democratic in nature.

Summarily, the Politicization of the head of Local Government in Dekina in Kogi state has produced significant negative effects on electoral activities and consolidating political participation. Some of the effects, factors determining the appointment of leadership structure in Kogi state rather than election, causes and how it effective administration, accountability, responsiveness, and facilitation of rural developmental projects among others shall be examined as follows which were gathered from the field through interviews conducted in study areas. Narrative analysis of interviews in social science research which gives more sense to the information gathered from the field is adopted alongside thematic content analysis of interviews which is useful in qualitative research of this nature and aims to find common patterns across data gathered from the field.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that democratic processes in Nigeria and Dekina LGA have been crippled by political godfatherism. This has led to a situation where elected positions are newly occupied by appointed leaders. This has resulted in a severe situation of political apathy among the electorate. If these ugly practices are not brought to an immediate end, it will result in a crippled democratic society and dictatorship is not a good option for the leadership style to be accepted. Public funds are misappropriated, the wrong hands are appointed into supposed elected political offices, the masses are subjugated and subjected to abject poverty. This is so because, when the leadership is corrupt invariably the concern of the people and the need for sustainable development will be the least on the mind of such corrupt leaders.

Consequently, the issue of politicization of Heads of LGC is not peculiar to Kogi state alone but with many other states. The politicization of heads of LGC in Kogi state, in particular, is conceived as support towards an economic investment that must produce enormous dividends at all means. Inexperience, not-qualify and visionless candidates are imposed for administrative

and total control of the political system, and that can be manipulated to serve their whims and caprices to enhance their enrichment by looting government funds detriment of the governed and the disagreement between the godfather and godson on their initial agreements always leave the state in disarray resulting into the death of many and the destruction of properties. Politicization (Godfatherism) is a dangerous development in Kogi politics. The electorates are disenfranchised, democracy truncated, and the poor masses impoverished as a result of poor administration. This negative practice of politicization (godfatherism) is a big termite eating deep into the political development of Kogi politics not until the electoral process produces a leader with a conscience with the love of the state at heart that will consider the welfare and wellbeing of the govern paramount, political stability and democratic development will not be achievable.

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