

## **NIGERIAN POLITICS AND PROBLEMS OF SUCCESSORS**

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### **Abstract**

*This study articulates the state of the Nigerian politics and the problems encountered in choosing successors. While the fictional godfather is characterized as a shadowy, dare-devil recluse, who combines immense under world financial muscle with near mythical powers of enormous proportions, which is to attain a further greasing of the ever-increasing vast financial empire, the Nigeria type has the added characterization of conceit, ego, loquacity, pettiness, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion. The political system has been under serious political equations that have consistently threatened the corporate and peaceful existence of the Nigerian state. As a result of the above, it questions the essence of the media in protecting democracy in Nigeria, what constitute democratic problems and panacea to be adopted towards ameliorating these challenges. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to explore the dynamics of political waves in Nigeria vis-a-vis promoting and protecting the interest of the masses within the polity. However, this phenomenon has now introduced various security risks to the game of politics in Nigeria such as political assassination, arms stockpiling, extortions, frauds and riggings. The fear expressed in this paper is that if this trend should continue the military may once again be "forced" out of the barracks by the ineptitude, insensitivity, maladministration and massive corruption which so far have characterized our democracy.*

**Keywords: Nigerian Politics, Political Godfatherism, Succession Issues, Democratic Problems, Panacea.**

### **Introduction**

Democracy is valued as a global practice when public interest is rated supreme. Nigeria is a federal system and the adoption of federal political format connotes a political arrangement that divides constitutionally, powers, spheres of influence and responsibilities between at least two levels of government (as the case is in America) or three levels of government (as is the case in Nigeria), in such a way that each level is supreme in its areas of jurisdiction. It is important to note that the problem of succession in our country is not just a civilian phenomenon. Even our unlamented military leadership had this problem when the coup makers after the death of Ironsi picked a junior officer Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon a northerner, over Brigadier Ogundipe, a southerner. Democratic process are practices and means adopted for the actualization of democratic dispensation and leadership, ranging from formation of political parties, to electoral campaigns, community mobilization, electoral skills, voters registration, contesting elections, voting and contributing to policy making and the process of

governance (Yusuf in Yusuf, 2000: 116). The domination of power by the hegemonic class in many parts of the contemporary world can thus be said to be nothing new but has a robust pedigree. The main lesson from all these works is that the study of political elites and leadership is very important for understanding the trajectories of development in any society. As Welsh observed, 3 political elites participate in, or influence the making of, decisions that allocate resources within and among social units'. A variety of conflicts are produced in the process. Two conditions, therefore, exist in all federal systems, the absence of which may nullify the "federalness" of the federal system. The first is a continuing sense and allegiance to primary (or ethnic/tribal) nationality among the federating units, a feeling which had existed prior to federating. The second condition is that the federating units, though desiring union, do not desire unity but, rather would want to maintain their ethnic/religious/linguistic or cultural identities. If unity is achieved the system is no longer a federal system but a unitary system. Ayoade (1988) has described this as a process of seeking unity without uniformity. The Nigerian situation, which we seek to examine in this paper, however makes it possible for both sub-elite and non-elite to become recruited into the political elite class, so long as they can meet the parochial conditions for such a recruitment exercise. This paper deals with how 'godfatherism' serves as a medium for such selective elite recruitment in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines political party as "an association recognized and registered in the constitution whose membership is open to every citizen irrespective of his place of birth, circumstances of birth, sex, religion or ethnic group, with the sole aim of canvassing for votes in support of candidates for elections". Deriving from the foregoing, it is almost impossible to conceive of a modern political system without a political party or parties. In fact the notion of a modern political system with all its complexities carries with it the notion of political parties which serve as a linking pin between diverse groups of people and government. The notion of political parties serving as linkage between the people and the government has been alluded to in a series of articles edited by Lawson (1980).

### **The Nature and Character of Nigerian Politics**

Politics in Nigeria like in any other states is a game to achieve either personal or group interest using state machinery. The attitude towards this struggle for power is determined by various factors that are society based. This has to a large extent placed the state on a negative pedestal in developmental rating. Formation, composition, culture, experiences etc. of Nigeria determine the nature and character of Nigerian politics. Colonial experience played great role in nature and character of the Nigerian state. Colonialism was a business adventure to achieve the interest of the colonial masters not for the interest of the colonized (Rodney, 1972). It had no democratic outlook. It was embedded in force, militancy and violence, suppression of opposition party and indigenous media. It promoted division among the united people and encouraged war among the unfriendly just to accomplish their mission of having the colonized perpetually under their control. Nnoli (2011:11) gave a clear picture of the foundation and formation of Nigerian state which determines its nature. He asserts Colonial master was not motivated by the desire to replicate in the colony the prevailing democracy in the metropolitan state. Rather, it was motivated by the need to hold down a conquered people, and force them to adopt a new social, economic, political, cultural and in some cases, religious way of life. In the process, it brought domination, oppression, exploitation, injustice and illegitimacy to a head and at the same time in the country. Thus the colonial origin of the Nigerian state ensured that power was the defining attribute of statehood...under the

circumstance the colonial state structure was authoritarian, antidemocratic, domineering, exploitative, repressive, unjust and illegitimate. Through forced labour, forced migration, forced education, the undemocratic colonial state ruled the country (Nnoli 2011:30). The 'political godfathers' in Nigeria build an array of loyalists around them and use their influence, which is often tied to monetary considerations, to manipulate the rest of the society. Political godfathers use their influence to block the participation of others in Nigerian politics. They are political gatekeepers: they dictate who participates in politics and under what conditions. The role of such people is highly injurious to the advancement of popular, participatory democracy in Nigeria. Political godfathers are responsible for most of the pre and post-election violence that we have seen in Nigeria. It is thus necessary to have a better understanding of their activities as a way of generating new ideas on how to make the political process in Nigeria less violent and more democratic. Our goal in this paper is to problematise how individuals become a basic cluster in patron-client relationships in Nigeria and in the process begin to negatively affect the political process in the country, often negatively.

### **Emergence of Political Parties in Nigeria**

The formation of the early political parties coincided with the emergence of the spirit of nationalism, both of which were engendered by the Clifford's constitution of 1922. Prior to this was the formation of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in 1920 in order that peoples of African descent can participate in their own governance; "an aim inspired not only by the writings of New-World Negroes like W.E. Du Bois and his antagonist, Marcus Garvey, but by the declaration of the American President himself on the right of all peoples to self-determination" (Crowder, 1966:254). The elective principle clause in the 1922 constitution was, however, the immediate factor that led to the formation of political parties. In response to this, Herbert Macaulay formed the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923 as a platform to contest the three elective positions for Lagos. Under him, the party won elections to the three elective positions in 1923, 1928 and 1933 until its monopoly and dominance was effectively challenged in 1938 by the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), a nationalist movement which evolved out of the former Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) in 1934 and which in turn evolved from the Union of Young Nigerians (UYN) formed just after the 1923 elections into the legislative house. Its leadership consisted of a crop of young and highly educated Nigerians such as Dr. J.C. Vaughan, Ayo Williams, Nnamdi Azikwe, S. Akinsanya, H.O. Davies and Ernest Ukoli. The conflict generated between the Igbos and the Yorubas over nominations eventually led to the departure of the Igbo elements led by Nnamdi Azikwe. It is instructive therefore, to note that as early as this period, what was to later characterize and become one of the major features of the political system and political parties in Nigeria had started to emerge and take root – ethnic politics and intolerance. Thus, the NYM became polarized and lost its national character to become a regional or a 'Yoruba' party.

A discernible characteristic of Nigerian political parties soon emerged at this time and this was the phenomenon of splinter or dissident or breakaway groups. This phenomenon is manifested in the form of party members breaking away to form other parties as a result of incompatibility, contradictory views, ideological standpoint, intolerance, failure to arrive at a compromise or a consensus or even personality clashes. In rather quick succession, the three

major parties of this period experienced this. Chief Akintola broke away from the AG and formed the United Peoples Party (UPP). In March, 1964, Chief Akintola formed the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) whose membership was made up of former members of UPP and NCNC. The inability of the NPC to accommodate some radical elements within it which sought for a peoples' oriented welfare program and the demolition of the feudal ideology and its hegemonic hold on the masses became a problem. The radical elements led by Aminu Kano left the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). In 1951, NCNC expelled some of its membership for 'un-party' activities. This expelled element led by Professor Eyo Ita, Dr. Udoma and Jaja Nwachuku formed the National Independent Party (NIP) in 1953.

Apart from the ones mentioned above, other parties which were of minor character and not major players in the political landscape of this period also emerged. These could be grouped into two types; those which represented and articulate minority ethnic views and those in opposition in their regions. Of the first type were the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by J.S. Tarka with its ethnic base among the Tivs of the middle belt, the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) led by Chief Dappa Dipriye with its base among the ethnic minority groups in the Delta region. Of the second type were the Borno Youth Movement (BYM) led by Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri, the Ilorin Talaka Parapo (ITP) founded by Josiah Olawoyin, the Dynamic Party (DP) led by Dr. Chike Obi and the Republican Party (RP) both in the East and the Midwest Democratic Front (MDF) in the Midwest.

The military struck in January 1966 and party politics of the first republic went into oblivion. However, it was restored with the lifting of the ban on party politics in September 1978. This process was kick-started with the drafting of a new constitution which opted for the adoption of an American-style presidency and separation of powers (Maier, 2000:57). Of the about 53 political associations that emerged to contest the 1979 elections, only 5 were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). A sixth party was later registered to contest the 1983 elections. The parties were National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP). Two major features of these parties, probably with the exception of NAP, could be discerned. The first was that they were patent offshoots of the former political parties of the first republic. This reflected the beginning, if not, a continuation of succession politics. The second was that the ethnic cloak was still visibly present and memberships of these parties were mainly drawn from the discredited politicians of the first republic.

Some of the parties that emerged were the Peoples' Solidarity Party (PSP), Peoples' Front of Nigeria (PFN), Liberal Convention (LC), Nigerian Labour Party (NLP) and Nigerian National Congress (NNC). However NEC in its wisdom refused to register them but instead submitted the draft of the report of the political bureau inaugurated on September 30, 1987, to organize a public debate regarding the political future of the country. The Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) in its wisdom accepted the report of the bureau and for the first time in history, decreed into existence two political parties – the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Party (NRP). The parties' programs, funding, ideologies, manifestoes, and structures were also decreed along with their existence. The two parties were

government-sponsored in all respects. First was that the government determined the modus operandi and ideology for the parties. In this respect, the SDP was a "little to the left" while the NRC was a "little to the right". Second was that their funding was derived from the government who also built secretariats all over the country for them and appointed key staff of the parties from among some serving civil servants. Third was that every member of the party was a 'joiner' not a 'founder'. As Maier (2000) has noted, the government's sponsorship of the two parties was so complete that they can be aptly described as government parastatals instead of political parties.

Going by the membership list of the two parties, it could be stated by extension that a marriage of convenience was contrived between former opposing political parties and individuals. For example, among the bulk of SDP members could be identified former members of the old AG, NCNC, NEPU, UPN, GNPP, NPP, and PRP. The party was led by Babagana Kingibe from 1990-92 and later by Chief Anthony Anenih. True to its decreed ideological stand, the party espoused progressive, populist and welfarist ideas. The NRC led by ultra-rights and conservative elements like Tom Ikimi and later Dr. Kusamotu fielded Alhaji Tofa as its presidential candidate. The party's pedigree can be traced to such conservative parties such as NPN, NNDP and NPC.

The Babaginda experiment did not materialize into concrete democracy partly because it was intended so from the on-set. However, the political unrest and agitations that followed the annulment of the June 12 1993 elections forced Babaginda to "step aside". An interim national government (ING) was put place under Chief Ernest Shonekan which was promptly disposed by General Sani Abacha on November 17, 1993. By December 1995, the ban on political parties was consequently lifted by the establishment of the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). On September 30, 1996, Abacha's umpire, Chief Dagogo-Jack announced the registration of five political parties out of the lot that had sought for registration without resolving the June 12 1993 debacle. The five parties registered which Chief Bola Ige sarcastically referred to as "the five fingers of a leprous hand" were United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM), Congress for National Consensus (CNC) and National Center Party of Nigeria (NCPN).

United Peoples Party (UPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), National Solidarity Party (NSP), Democratic Advance Party (DAP) and United Democratic Party (UDP). The outcome of the 5 December 1998 local government election resulted in six of the parties being deregistered leaving only AD, PDP and APP to contest the other elections. More political parties were to be later registered by INEC which brought the total to 40. Notable among these new parties were the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), National Conscience Party (NCP) led by Chief Gani Fawehinmi, All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the new name adopted by the former APP, Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ) led by Alhaji M.D. Yusuf, a former Inspector-General of Police, Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) led by Alhaji Balarabe Musa, the Green Party (GP) led by Olisa Agbakoba, All Peoples Liberation Party (APLP) and Justice Party (JP) led by Reverend Chris Okotie among others. The PDP won the 1999, 2003 and the 2007 presidential elections.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The politics of godfatherism has also introduced mediocrity in the public bureaucracy resulting from faulty and lopsided recruitment method. Based on these findings, some of the major recommendations include; that the National Orientation Agency should intensify efforts in the reorientation of the political actors and employers of labour in the public service to enable them know the shortcomings of godfather politics. The law makers should enact a law to prohibit godfather politics in Nigeria and offenders should be barred from participating in political activities in Nigeria. Same law should guide recruitment, posting and training in the bureaucracy.

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