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**Key Terms:** Nigeria; godfatherism; Edo State; democracy; 2007 election; money politics.

**Abstract**
Nigeria is one of the African countries that is responding to Western pressures to make its states acquire a liberal and democratic culture. Over the years, Nigeria has practiced what can be described as fraudulent democracy. This democracy has been characterized by obnoxious acts such as indiscriminately using money and by very powerful and influential members of the elite class, popularly called “political godfathers,” imposing political leaders on the people. This situation has already become a culture in Nigeria because many politicians who want to contest and win elections always look for such persons to support them. This means that they no longer depend on the electorates to win elections, but instead rely on the political godfathers. This political culture was truncated in the 2007 gubernatorial election in Edo state, Nigeria. This paper examines how the problem of money politics and political godfatherism can be eliminated from Nigeria’s politics in order to strengthen democratic governance in the country. The methodology of the study is essentially analytical and based on lessons from the 2007 gubernatorial election in Edo State. The paper argues that Nigerians are becoming more conscious of their political

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rights and the need to shun illegal electoral practices. Moreover, this study highlights, among other things, the importance of prosecuting and punishing any one engaged in electoral fraud, including political godfathers. The use of election petitions tribunal should be refined in order to ensure the speedy trial of cases.

Introduction
The role money plays in politics has constantly remained an issue because of allegations of abuse and lack of control. It is generally believed that politics is an expensive venture and that only those people with the proper wherewithal can successfully navigate the murky waters. This is because of the claim that money contributes to the purchase of electoral votes that ensure victory. This claim is particularly prominent in developing countries, especially in Nigeria. Money politics have made it impossible for many individuals without access to huge financial resources to participate in and win elections in Nigeria. Money politics and political godfatherism have undoubtedly ruined democratic governance in Nigeria. This contention is supported by the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy index (2008). The report classified Nigeria, alongside 51 other countries, as an authoritarian regime. Moreover, with an overall score of 3.53 out of the maximum 10 points, Nigeria placed 124 of the 167 countries ranked (Atakpu 2008:1).

Money politics and political godfatherism, which have become a cultural element in Nigeria’s politics, are certainly problematic to the practice of democracy. Using lessons from the 2007 gubernatorial elections in Edo State, Nigeria, this paper examines the effects that these illegal practices have on the future of democracy in Nigeria. The first section conceptualizes money politics and political godfatherism, while the other sections discuss issues in money politics and political godfatherism including lessons that can be learned from the Edo State 2007 gubernatorial election.
Money Politics and Political Godfatherism – An Overview
Money politics refers to the excessive use of financial resources to encourage illegal activities or behaviours in politics, especially during periods of election. On the other hand, political godfatherism describes a situation in which very powerful and influential members of the elite class use their power, money and influence to determine who should rule or occupy a given political office and who impose these leaders on the people. The leaders are generally forced upon the masses through intimidation, harassment and an excessive use of money. Political godfathers act as the financial backbone for politicians who want to occupy political offices at all cost. Such political office holders usually become tied to the apron string of their godfathers. According to Igbuzor (2002:66):

Political godfatherism is a term now reserved for God forsaken criminals who will go to any length; I mean any length to achieve their set goals of wielding political power including arson, intimidation, warning, flogging and sometimes assassination’. With the money diverted from the coffers of the Nigerian or State governments, they equipped their ‘army’ with the latest weapons with which their foot soldiers or political thugs recruited from amongst numerous jobless graduates and undergraduates from Nigerian and state universities to terrorize, kill and main their kits and kin who oppose them. There may have been numerous killings by orders from these political godfathers. Assassinations reported as armed robbery gone wrong are so numerous to count, and these killings go unsolved by the Nigerian ill equipped police. The modus operandi of the Nigerian political godfather is clear even to the blind. The godfather or the godson occupies an exalted position in government, rather than spending the available fund to establish a factory or set up a process that will employ the youths like school leavers and university graduates, the money is diverted to Swiss or other European or American banks. School leavers and university graduates are therefore made jobless and provide fertile ground for recruiting foot soldiers that will do the evil bidding of these godfathers. Godfatherism is an evil building block for corruption, retrogression, under development, mediocrity, backwardness and perpetual poverty of the people.
Money politics and the political culture of godfatherism have turned Nigerian democracy into the government of godfathers by their sons, or puppets for the enslavement and destruction of the people. According to western definition and practice, this is really a negation of liberal democracy.

Looking at the Nigerian political terrain, one can observe that the electoral process has been bedeviled by many intractable problems that have been perpetuated by political godfathers and their allies. These problems include violence, intimidation, abusive language, political assassination, rigging elections, disseminating falsehoods, and manipulating the government owned mass media and the Nigerian police force for partisan political ends. Money politics and political godfatherism have also resulted in the illegal printing of ballot papers, the illegal manufacturing of ballot boxes, the denial of electoral rights, citizens falsifying election results, false announcements of candidates and the beating, killing or maiming of political opponents. During election periods, politicians who want to win at all cost use money to buy their votes. This is achieved in the following ways:

- Sharing money or gift items with the electorates
- Giving money (bribes) to officers charged with the responsibility of conducting free and fair elections
- Paying law enforcement agents either to intimidate anyone who fails to vote for the ‘chosen candidate’ or to remain aloof when they witness illegal electoral practices, and
- Employing thugs to intimidate or coerce voters to vote for a particular candidate, preventing elections from taking place in certain areas or encouraging other acts that could prevent the conduct of free and fair elections
The use of money for illegal activities during periods of election often results in electoral fraud which impinges on democratic governance in Nigeria.

Antecedents to Money Politics and the Political Culture of Godfatherism

Before the introduction of British colonialism, in the territorial entity that is now known as Nigeria, there were various ethnic groups who lived and interacted with each other mostly through trade and, in some cases, through conquests marked by warfare. Apart from this contact, they existed as autonomous socio-cultural, political and economic units that held some cultural patterns in common. For example, the monarchical feudal system existed both in the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria amongst groups including the Hausa-Fulani emirates, the Yoruba and the Bini chiefdoms (Anikpo, 2002:51).

Despite these similarities, pre-colonial ethnic groups maintained their respective autonomies in the governing and economic exploitation of their resources. This situation existed until the British colonialists forced them to become nations in 1914. During the colonial era, the British practiced an organization style of ‘divide and rule’ in which they ruled the people. This system did nothing to correct the divisive barriers that existed between the various ethnic groups relating to ethnicity, religion and class. Rather, these elements were reinforced and used as instruments, by the colonialists, to gain competitive advantages in the new political order. These advantages allowed them to fulfill their economic desires to exploit Nigeria’s collective resources and to dominate Nigeria in the governing process, without any commitment to building up the ideals of democracy or respect for human rights in the nation. During the colonial and post colonial periods in Nigeria, the dividing categories of ethnicity, religion and class became intense and hardened. In turn, class configurations became interwoven with ethnic alliances, which enabled factions of the
ruling class to strive to gain competitive political and economic advantages over other contenders in their quests to govern the nation.

The colonial legacy has turned the state into an indispensable instrument of capital accumulation. As such, the state thus constitutes the principal instrument for private appropriation of capital. Moreover, different factions of the petty and comprador bourgeoisie engage in fierce battles gain control over the instrumentality of the state so they can utilize its allotted and distributive powers for their own private ends. Furthermore, as various factions of the dominant class struggle to capture state power, they pay little attention to the economic and social concerns of the ordinary citizens. Moreover, because their material needs have been neglected and the government has become unstable, ordinary citizens have become alienated from politics. Politics has thus become the dominant classes’ exclusive domain, which is manifested in the political culture of godfatherism (Agbese, 1990:27).

Elites came to view acquiring state power as the only way to secure life, property and some level of freedom. This accounts for why power from Nigeria’s independence until now has been sought out with such desperation that political competition tends to degenerate into warfare. This was gloriously manifested in Oyo State following the power tussles between governor Lodoja and Adedibu over a share of security votes, the crisis between Dr. Chris Ngige (former governor of Anambra state) and his erstwhile godfather Chris Uba that brought mayhem into state, as well as the impeachment crisis that rocked the Ekiti, Plateau and Anambra States of Nigeria, respectively.

**Effect of Money Politics and Political Culture of Godfatherism on Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

In its modern usage, democracy denotes a representative government which attempts to stimulate a sense of attachment to policies and programmes of the government amongst the governed. This suggests that the ultimate power rest with the people in a democratic system of
government. In advanced democratic states, Berman and Murphy (1996:6) espoused the view that:

Voters are free to propose a wide currency of public policy options and to join groups that promote those options. Voters may even directly determine through referenda which policy will become the law of the land. This pattern contrasts sharply with that of an authoritarian regime in which government stand apart from the people, oppressing citizens by depriving them of their basic freedom to speak, associate, write and participate in political life without fear of punishment.

From the above information, it is obvious that the form of democracy being practiced in Nigeria, under the influence of money and godfatherism is in the real sense an authoritarian regime. The following are specific effects that this form of government has on the political system:

i) It makes the conducting elections very expensive. In other words, politicians who want run in and win elections must have huge sums of money before they can ‘buy’ political power.

ii) The huge expenditure incurred in purchasing political power prevents political office holders from delivering quality services to the people. This is because public funds are used to settle the debts incurred by candidates during election and for giving rewards to those who aided or abetted electoral fraud.

iii) It allows political office holders to dismiss their duty to be responsible to the electorates since they were not elected by them. Instead, they feel accountable to their political godfathers. This is because they installed them and can guarantee that they stay in office.
Money Politics, Political Godfatherism and Democratic Contradictions in Nigeria

Democratic governments ensure that the power the people entrust to their representatives is transformed into authority through elections. The authority therefore becomes the right to govern in any democratic setting. It thus follows that those who cannot procure the mandate of the people by gaining the majority of the votes in an election do not have the right to govern or represent the electorates. It is equally true that it is elections that provide governments with the legitimacy or acceptability they require from the people to govern successfully (Adejumobi, 2004:3-6; Omadjohwefe, 2007:68). From the foregoing information, it is obvious that situations in which political godfathers use money and influence or in which they side track the electorates during elections creates illegitimacy in governments and contradictions in democracy.

In Nigeria, democratic values and expectations are contradictive and are compromised as political office seekers view the election process as a do or die affair. In their desperation to emerge winners, they employ unlawful methods, some of which actively manipulate the entire electoral process to their personal advantage (Omadjohwefe, 2007:68).

Money politics and political godfatherism have increased the occurrence of electoral fraud in Nigeria. Moreover, electoral malpractice is becoming more sophisticated with each democratic experience. As Zabadi (2003:16) noted, every stage of the electoral process, from the registration of political parties and voters up to the declaration of results, is fraught with electoral fraud.

Using wealth to gain control of government mechanisms in Nigeria is a pathetic situation. Joseph described the experience (1999:155) as follows:
Nigerian elections are practically a competition for the control of the electoral machinery and secondarily, a competition for individual votes. Any party which fails to win control of this machinery in a particular area, or to neutralize the influence of its opponents over the personnel operating the machinery, risks losing elections regardless of the actual support it enjoys among the electorates.

Another way in which democratic contradiction manifests itself is by having political godfathers impose candidates on the electorates in party primaries or general elections. Although this situation was very rampant in almost all the states of the federation during the 2007 elections, the case of Edo state and the lessons that can be learned from this case will be examined in this paper.

The 2007 Gubernatorial Election in Edo State, Nigeria
On April 14, 2007, the majority of the people of Edo State, Nigeria came out *en mass* to perform their civic duty i.e. electing a new governor for the state. During the election, many people experienced incredible situations during attempts to exercise their political rights. The intimidation, brutality and savagery to which the electorates were subjected left much to be desired. During the election, many people were dehumanized while others lost their lives.

Before the election, opinion polls conducted across Nigeria favoured Adams Oshiomhole of the Action Congress to win the election. This is because of Lucky Igbinedion of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), perceived shortcomings during his eight years as governor of Edo state. As a result, the people decided that they needed a clean break from the old order, including the influence of political godfathers such as Tony Anenih and Dr. Samuel Ogbemudia. However, the role that both Chief Tony Anenih and Dr. Samuel Ogbemudia played in the final analysis of the election is generally part of another question altogether.
On the day of the election, it was a straight battle between Professor Osarieme Osunbor and Comrade Adams Oshiomhole. Two days after the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) could not announce the results for Oshiomhole’s supporters, apparently acting on hints from inside INEC, barricaded the commission’s office in Benin City and threatened to destroy the building if the results were not released according to their desires. The tension in the state forced the electoral body to relocate to its National Headquarters in Abuja where they declared Osunbor the winner of the election on April 18, 2007, which was four days after the election (The Guardian, 2008:4).

Declaring Professor Osarieme Osunbor as the winner of the election caused protests to break out in Benin City, the state capital, and other parts of the state. The people protested because they were aware that the declaration made by INEC did not reflect the votes of the people, but instead represented the desires of political godfathers. This caused the people to decide to fight and even die for their votes. In order to prevent violence and allow the rule of law to take its course, believing that the problem would be settled peacefully by the Edo State Election Petitions Tribunal, the assumed winner of the election Comrade Adam Oshiomhole told the people to remain calm.

On May 20, 2008, following serious investigations, the Chairman of the Edo State Governorship Election Petition Tribunal, Justice Peter Umeadi, declared Adams Oshiomhole governor of Edo State. Ruling on the petition filed by Oshiomhole, Action Congress Governorship Candidate on the 14th of April, 2007 governorship election in Edo State, against the election of Prof. Osarieme Osunbor, Umeadi declared that Oshiomhole polled the highest number of valid votes during the election. The tribunal then directed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to “withdraw the Certificate of Return issued to Osunbor” and to issue the same to Oshiomhole as Governor of Edo State who scored a quarter of the total votes cast in 12
of the 18 local government areas of the state. As reported by The Guardian (2008: 18):

The tribunal headed by Justice Peter Umeadi had, in its 6-hour ruling, declared Mr. Oshiomhole winner having polled 166,577 votes against Prof. Osunbor’s 129,017. Mr. Oshiomhole, it added, secured one quarter of the votes cast in 12 local government areas of the state, pointing out that the petitioner had proved beyond reasonable doubt malpractices and non-compliance by INEC with the Electoral Act of 2006 in the 12 local government areas of the state. It held that the petitioner had been able to prove its allegations of multiple voting, rigging and outright electoral fraud and multiple accreditations during the election. After reviewing the votes cast at the election, the tribunal said it found 51,534 invalid for the PDP because they were not stamped at the back while it recorded 13,610 invalid votes for the AC bringing the total to 65,144. These invalid votes were cancelled out right by the tribunal. Similarly, the tribunal cancelled all votes scored by both parties on account of over-voting, and said the total number of votes scored by the AC candidate in the four local government areas of Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba Okhai and Etsako East which were not challenged by the respondents stood at 84,893 for the AC while PDP scored 29,657. In the two contentious local government areas of Akoko Edo and Etsako Central, the tribunal held that contrary to INEC’s claim that elections were held in the two local government councils, no election took place and, therefore, discountenanced the evidence of INEC’s Director of Operations in Edo State, Mr Kayode Olawale, and the results issued.

Immediately after the tribunal made its decision, Professor Osunbor appealed to the Court of Appeals to reconsider the case. On the November 12, 2008, the Court of Appeals declared Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, the Action Congress (AC) candidate, as the winner of the election. In a swift reaction to this judgment, Professor Osunbor said "it is a victory for rule of law." Most legal experts described the judgment as a historical judgment. After reviewing the judgment of the election petition tribunal and the reduction of the 82 grounds of appeal from Oserhieme Osunbor to four, the President of the Court of Appeals,
Justice Umaru Abdulahi, delivered the three and a half hour ruling in which he declared that Oshiomhole received over 23 percent of the votes cast in 16 local government councils and that the two councils of Etsako Central and Akoko Edo were cancelled. The Court made its ruling proclaiming that, “The Court is in total agreement with the tribunal that Comrade Adams Oshiomhole scored the highest number of votes cast in the April, 2007 governorship election” (The Guardian, 2008). Immediately following the judgment’s declaration, the streets that were earlier deserted out of fear of violence became flooded by broom carrying youths, women and supporters of the AC. While the jubilation continued, the large number of people located along strategic areas of the state capital for securing, including the popular Ring Road, later joined in the euphoria of the victory dance. However, the dance was nearly marred by a ghastly motor bike accident which led to the deaths of two people at the Ikpoba Slope area of the state capital.

Commenting on his victory, after a victory ride from the venue of the appeal to the state party secretariat along Airport Road, Benin-City, Oshiomhole said the judgment by the Court of Appeals was a "victory for the people of the state, the judiciary and the entire democracy of the nation." His lead Counsel Wole Olanipekun (SAN) described the judgment as "an epic one, a watershed in jurisprudence as far as electoral petition is concerned" saying "it left no stone unturned; it is a fantastic judgment. The judgment of the Court of Appeal just affirms what the lower court said earlier. They have demonstrated that any where we are or go, the rule of law should be supreme" (The Guardian, 2008:2).

The Impact of the Electoral Tribunal Judgment and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria
The impact of the electoral tribunal judgment is far-reaching, especially when the judgments in cases made after it, in places such Oyo, Ekiti and Ondo, are considered. This shows that there is no place for people who illegally occupy political offices to hide. Some of these occupants would
find themselves in the political wilderness if the Court of Appeals removes them from their office. The decisions of the tribunal and of the court show that the days of election rigging in Nigeria are over and that for those people who thought of illegally holding office as a veritable means of livelihood should begin looking for alternative jobs. For the governors of the state, where appeals are still pending, it is not over until it is over.

The greatest achievement that resulted from the judgment is that it cemented a place for democracy in Nigeria. The rule of law has now taken a firm stand in the polity. This is because one cannot talk about democracy without talking about the rule of law: they are interwoven. There are no successful democracies without the rule of law for it is the axle upon which successful democracies stands.

The judgment is clearly a warning that godfatherism is no longer going to be accepted as a part of Nigeria’s political culture. Once there is evidence that an election has been rigged, the tribunal will now invalidate such an election and to ensure that the rightful candidate wins the election. Apart from this, the court has sent the further message that apart from putting an end to the era of godfatherism, they are also putting an end to the era of money politics in which people believe that justice can be purchased. If it were not for the judiciary, Oshiomhole would not be in office today. No society progresses when you ostracize the right people from the realms of governance.

Moreover, the judgment rekindles hope for the legitimacy of democracy, the rule of law, and the ability of the judiciary to correct wrongs done by INEC in Nigeria. INEC must be re-organized and it must rededicate itself to Nigeria. It should be noted that INEC has subscribed to what democracy means and what it should be and consequently, it should stop causing dislocations for Nigeria democracy. INEC should stop acting as a landmine that blocks democratic development and progress of Nigeria.
Conclusion
During the course of the study, it was noted that money and godfatherism played a prominent role in the political affairs of Nigeria, especially in the electoral system. To enforce this point, particular reference was made to the 2007 General Elections in Edo State which, to a large extent, truncated the true democratic system of administration. This is because a democratic system of government that does not allow for true democratic practices will not make foster a strong government or strong development for society.

In light of this information, this paper recommended the following recommendations that will create a true democratic system of administration in the country, especially in Edo State:

i) Political education should be encouraged by civil society organizations. It should be encouraged because to be successful, democracies require citizens who not only accept democratic decision making as a core value, but who are also willing to assume an active role in the process of self government.

ii) Electoral reform should include political finance reform. This will help to ensure money is properly used in political activities especially during the elections. Before such reforms are made, adequate research is essential.

iii) Anyone whose election is nullified or made void either on the grounds of rigging, fraud or because that person was not the duly accredited candidate, must pay back the state coffers all the salary and other prerequisites of office he received as a result of being an impostor.

In order to curtail electoral fraud, people involved in illegal electoral practices should be prosecuted and punished.
References


