



International Journal of Development and Sustainability

ISSN: 2186-8662 – www.isdsnet.com/ijds

Volume 7 Number 6 (2018): Pages 1800-1814

ISDS Article ID: IJDS17102402



The role of neo-patrimonialism in elections and the challenge of national security in contemporary Nigerian society: An appraisal

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Abstract

This paper focuses the role of neopatrimonialism in Nigeria's elections and the challenge of National security in contemporary Nigerian society: an appraisal. Data were collected through secondary sources and analyzed using qualitative technique. Among the findings, the loss of legitimacy in Nigeria's elections since 1999 was because godfathers have turned elections into a 'do or die affair' through the brandishing all kinds of weapons. Also, election periods are now wrought with fear, anxiety and desperation. In addition, Nigerian electorates are now see elections as meaningless, ineffective, and inconsequential political rituals aimed at instilling bad governance. The study also notes (that) the competitions among godfathers to control state resources through the imposition of candidates have defeated the purpose for good governance. Finally, the upsurge of political assassinations, organized kidnapping, and other evils leading to a huge number of senseless killings, displacement of thousands, and the destruction of properties during the 2015 elections was frightening. Based on these, the study recommends an outright ban on all forms of financial sponsorship of aspirants including material inducement on electorates. Also, government should enact and enforce all relevant laws to empower the country's electoral body to be truly independent. Finally, public enlightenment should be embarked upon to educate the citizenry of their democratic and institutional rights and create the awareness that contest for elective positions is not 'a must win'.

Keywords: Neopatrimonialism; Democratic Governance; Credible Election; Electoral Violence; Godson

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Cite this article as: Chukwu, C.C., Ume, I.S. and Dibia, S.B. (2018), "The role of neo-patrimonialism in elections and the challenge of national security in contemporary Nigerian society: An appraisal", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 7 No. 6, pp. 1800-1814.

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1. Introduction

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigerian politics has been bedeviled by electoral manipulations and violence due to the role and dominance of neopatrimonialists. As a result, politics has not been ideologically driven, but money-oriented and by extension, has become highly disruptive to social life, thereby creating some negative implications for the realization of the collective well-being of individuals and society as a whole. According to Otoghile et al. (2014), involvement in politics has basically become a means for primitively accumulating wealth through the sponsorship of candidates. Reflecting on the centrality of politics in Nigeria with its attendant domination by businessmen whose surrogates ascend the throne of governance with no developmental plans, the mission to plunder the people's assets thereby sacrificing collective development for self aggrandizement; transferring collective wealth into personal cum family wealth has assumed prominence. In other words, political representatives are imposed on the people by big men to recoup their investment.

Neopatrimonialism, as a concept, was developed and applied to the African state by Eisenstaedt (1973), Migdal (1998) and others in the 1970s and 1980s. It derives its meaningfulness from Max Weber's work; and it denotes the co-existence of two of his ideal types of authority: patrimonial and legal-rational. Extending its explanation, neopatrimonialism conjures up a system of social hierarchy where "big men" (patron) use state resources in order to secure the loyalty of some individuals who could be referred to as clients in the general population. It is an informal patron-client relationship that can reach from the topmost in state structures down to individuals in small rural areas. In this relationship, political power is used to acquire wealth and status for the power holder and his network of personal supporters than to actualize the dreams and aspirations of the general population (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997, in Thomas and Allen, 2000). Despite the existence of formal rational-legal bureaucratic structures, governance in Nigeria is still characterized by people in positions of authority appropriating state resources for personal gain. The fundamental idea behind the concept of neopatrimonialism is that formal state institutions are interwoven with informal, particularistic politics. Consequently, communal affairs are sacrificed and privatized in such a manner that no clear distinction exists again between what constitutes public and private agenda (Médard, 1982). Based on this, it has been argued that poor leadership and bad governance in Nigeria has prompted the mass production of "godfathers and godsons" (patron-client relationship). In reality, the practice of neopatrimonialism involves a strong bond between the patron and the client, a bond of loyalty, compliance and mutual understanding that relies on calculated political and business decisions, and even affection (Hyung-Gon, 2007)

Nigerians have witnessed several cases of electoral violence in the form of assassinations, bomb-blasts, intimidations, murders, and destruction of properties perpetrated by neopatrimonialists to recover their investment from the sponsorship of godsons. Essentially neopatrimonial politics have developed the capacity of being able to divert public resources for private lucrative gains (Otoghile et al., 2014). From this view, poor leadership and bad governance have crippled the country's progress in virtually every field of human endeavour (Nnamdi, 2009).

Thus, in the bid to chart a new course for good governance and mutual trust between the leaders and the led for the purpose of transparency, accountability and probity (TAP), it has widely been accepted that the development and wellbeing of a society at any given period does not depend on the practice of neopatrimonialism, rather on conferring the sovereign right on the people themselves to choose who governs them. By extension, it depends on democratic institutions being enshrined, strengthened and sustained by selfless leaders who understand the principles of participatory democracy. This assertion is in line with the tenet of good governance which hovers around the proper use of legitimate power and authority to accomplish the dreams and aspirations for the common good of the people. In contemporary Nigerian society, the absence of transparency, accountability and probity (TAP) which is at the heart of any democracy and which helps to strengthen the legitimacy of government, its policies, decisions and public officials in the eyes of the people is most worrisome.

With the absence of good governance which has essentially jettisoned transparency, accountability and probity (TAP) in the electoral system, neopatrimonialism has become a Nigerian product. The role of neopatrimonialism in the falsification of the will of the people and the open declaration and empowerment of losers (godsons) as winners has not only led directly to socio-political upheavals, which is most contrary to the values of democracy, civilization and humanity, to a sober reflection. Introspecting into the history of elections in Nigeria, and how each had been massively affected by electoral violence and vote-rigging, including the immediate past, the 2015 general elections, one would without doubt have observed that the threat to national security, economic decay, insurgency, terrorism, Fulani herdsmen and the continued political party defection from one political party to the other is a consequence of the patronage of neopatrimonialism.

In the federal elections of 1979 that ushered in the Second Republic, electoral violence coupled with election rigging were reported, confirming the popular saying at the time “win first and go to court later” (Olaitan, 2005). In recognition of the mass rigging recorded in the 1983 election, coupled with the incursion of the military into the murky waters of Nigeria’s politics, there was a paradigm shift from the secret ballot system to the open ballot system. This system involved the voters queuing behind the candidates of their choice and that element of secrecy which had aided rigging was removed. The Option A4 which was meant to halt the exploitation of such maladies associated with election rigging by political actors was rejected on the assumption of General Abdulsalam for whatever reasons.

Ever since, elections in Nigeria have been the enthronement of the choices of godfathers through electoral fraud and manipulation of figures and data to deny the rightful winners of electoral mandates given to them by the majority and certified by the electoral process. As a result, Nigeria electoral and political landscape has fallen from par to below par and has moved from violence to greater violence. Buttressing this position, the European Union Observer Mission described the 2003 federal and State elections as falling short of the basic international and regional standards for democratic elections and that given the lack of transparency and evidence of fraud, including violence, confidence was lost in the collation process leading to the release of the results of the elections (Onwe et al., 2015).

The International and local election observers (the Common Wealth Election Monitoring groups and the Civil Society) prior to 2015 elections, described 2011 general elections as the most disorganized and fraudulent. People's votes were not only blatantly stolen, rigged, but the mandate of the people hijacked through the practice of neopatrimonialism. All available statistical analyses of the 2015 elections showed that they were also marred by the same flaws: poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities (card reader), significant evidence of fraud, particularly during result collation process, voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for contestants and numerous incidents of violence. In every respect, the 2015 elections (State, Local and Federal elections) had come and gone but the wounds created and the injustices perpetrated have continued to linger, particularly as Nigerians march towards 2019 elections.

It is important to note that right from the classical times and indeed, throughout the ages to modern times, philosophers and social thinkers have always pondered on the rightness and wrongness of issues and what should constitute a morally and ethically accepted standard of behaviour (Ebaye and Eteng, 2009). While attempts are being fashioned to build a morally and ethically Nigerian society, it is most troublesome to observe that Nigeria is still deeply involved in the politics of neopatrimonialism which has electoral fraud and electoral violence as its main character.

Consequent upon this ugly trend, neopatrimonialism has catapulted elections in Nigeria to 'a must win competition' in order to wrestle the state treasury from the majority. With the state treasury safely in their custody, what is "morally right" is solely determined by them not because they are influential and powerful, but because they are morally decrepit. The practice and embrace of neopatrimonialism has erased all traces of moral code in the Nigerian electoral system. Political power acquisition is now a means to self aggrandizement. Concurring, Dudley (1955) avers that "Politics means money and money means politics, to get politics there is always a price. To be a member of the government party means "Open Avenue" to government patronage, Contract deals and the likes". The leadership becomes, according to Onwe, et al., (2015), self-recruiting. The result becomes the breakdown of justice, and violence immediately develops as a feature of the struggle for power, thus, establishing itself as an emerging culture.

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has been confronted with the problem of national security arising from uncontrollable elections violence leading to loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties, which Ajadike (2010) avers, is threatening peace and the institutionalization of democratic principles in Nigeria. Corroborating, Ani et al. (2013) opined that the level and magnitude of electoral and political violence witnessed during the 2011 presidential elections was distressing. National development was sacrificed for self aggrandizement; national wealth converted to family wealth; education sacrificed for bogus projects and corruption enthroned as a dominant way of life. Earlier, Williams and Turner (1978) described Nigerian politics as the process of gaining control of the public resources for private ends. This position is hinged on the fact that those who have always come as "Messiahs" to restore sanity to the polity have always been found wanting in their previous engagements, but the absence of a good retentive memory has been Nigeria's greatest bane. The removal of History and Social science as subjects in secondary school curricular has not helped matters; it has further made Nigerian brains clean slates (tabula-rasa).

The increase in electoral violence at every turn of election in Nigeria has been alarming, as it continues to occur in a more frightening dimension. Whether it is admissible or not, the contemporary manifestations suggest that the intents to violently intimidate opponents in order to delay or otherwise influence an electoral victory against the wishes of the electorates have assumed epidemic proportions, becoming serious threats to democratic institutionalization in Nigeria than ever before. Viewing from this platform, the erstwhile United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon likewise realized the destructiveness in the politics of neopatrimonialism when he submitted out that *'Democracy is premised on the ballot box and not on violence'* (Ban Ki-moon, 2011). Elucidating his position, Ban Ki-moon is of the position that election violence and other violent crimes in the country have negative implications on national security, democracy, good governance and economic development. This is because, among other things, their activities dismantle democratic structures; prevent provision of state services, such as health, education, commerce and security. Moreover, election violence perpetrated by godfathers has forced thousands to flee their homes, jobs and communities, pushing them into poverty. Basically, the staggering posture of electoral violence being remotely sponsored and controlled by the "big men" leaves much to be desired in Nigerian democratic experiment.

As an upshot of the above, this paper attempts to examine the distasteful inscrutability of the role of neopatrimonialism in elections and the challenge of national security in contemporary Nigerian society with a view to suggesting ways of protecting and ensuring credible elections and also guaranteeing the safety of our nascent democracy.

2. Study materials

This study examines the role of neopatrimonialism in elections and the challenge of national security in contemporary Nigerian society with a view to suggesting ways of protecting and ensuring credible elections and also guaranteeing the safety our nascent democracy. Literatures related to the variables were reviewed. This helped in identifying the scope already covered by previous scholars on the subject matter which served as a guide to the present study. The work relied basically on secondary sources of data in which existing records from secondary sources were used. The study employed descriptive method in the analysis of data.

3. Theoretical framework

The challenges of neopatrimonialism and the security of Nigeria's democracy has been a source of major concern. Therefore to elucidate on it, this paper employs the elite theory of power developed by three famous sociologists: Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosea (1858-1941) and Robert Michels (1876-1936).

The importance of elite theory of power for this study cannot be over emphasised. There are two types of elites, governing elites and non-governing elites. Pareto distinguished between 'governing elite' and 'non-

governing elite'. Government elite is one that wields power for the time being while 'non-governing elite constantly endeavours to replace it by showing greater ability and excellence. In other words, the governing elites would no more cope with changes and demands of the people and become so unpopular and ineffective before the entire population and the non-governing elite. It is at this stage that the non-governing elite will mobilize their constituents for the desired change. In short, behaviour of elite is characterized by a constant competition between governing and non-governing elites. The elites continue to circulate in power in what is called 'circulation of elites' because of their perceived superior endowments. The only distinctive qualities which separate one elite group from another are in terms of their instincts and sentiments. This is what is called 'circulation of elites'. From this exposition, the chance of the Nigerian masses graduating into the rank of elites is almost zero not necessarily because the masses lack the numerical voting strength with which to decide who represents them but because they lack what keeps and maintains the elite in position: ill-gotten wealth, and brutal power. Unfortunately, the masses do not have any of these instruments of power to spring into the elite class and therefore may not be asking for transfer of power from the elite. But as it is in other developed societies of the world, the Nigerian masses are basically asking to be allowed to make their choice of who leads them

Elucidating further, Pareto classified the *circulated elites* into *lions* and *foxes*. Elites of Lions rule by brute force. They are dictatorial, but swift in taking decisions. They possess military strategies and tactics to deal decisively with situations. The Foxes on the other hand, carry with them some peculiarities in their sentiments and derivatives. Like foxes in nature, this class of elites is cunning and very diplomatic. They combine intellect with selfish dispositions. As observed in Nigeria, it is not out of place for the lions to recruit the foxes into government through appointments as ministers, commissioners, board members and ambassadors, among others. This is possibly so because once elite always elite; elites are elites any day. When not directly in power, the non-governing godfathers could be co-opted into power by cognate godfathers; or they remain basically as non-governing godfathers or godfathers *in opposition* but not as non-godfathers. The advantage is that the practice of neopatrimonialism does not last forever; it comes and goes. And like the movement of sea water in low and high tides, the governing elites could be swept offshore while the non-governing godfathers are swept back into the sea to become part and parcel of it (the rate of defection from PDP to APC is a clear manifestation the stated). This also will last for a time though. In a similar way, Mosca (1858-1941) identified two classes of people in any polity, namely:

- Those who Rule (the ruling class).
- Those who are Ruled (the subjects).

According to Charles (2010), the ruling class though always in minority, possesses and controls power through the manipulation of elections results thereby restricting all advantages accruing from political offices to themselves alone. Pareto justifies this unholy manipulation by classifying the minority into lions and foxes generally known to betray sentiments of orderliness.

With this classification, ugly as it is, there is indeed so much danger ahead mirroring the kind of society Nigeria is currently evolving into. As a people, available literature showed that Nigerians have witnessed a relentless assault on their norms and a profound shift in their attitude toward common good. By extension,

they have experienced so much social regression, so much decadence, in so short a period of time that today, they live in an age where too often, rules are turned upside down, principles jettisoned and character sacrificed for whatever is available for the continued existence of neopatrimonial politics. As a result, it is argued that Nigerians, have continued to celebrate immediate gratifications, the crossing of all moral boundaries, and even now the breaking of all social taboos just to steal, embezzle state funds and remains politically relevant.

4. What is Election?

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines election as when someone is chosen through vote for an official position. Since the 17th century, elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy operates (Britannica, Encyclopedia 2009). Basically, election, according to Gwinn and Nortan (1992), is the formal process of selecting a person for public office or accepting or registering a political proposition by voting. It fundamentally involves the selection of a person or persons for office through the secret ballot and also making choices as between alternatives (Eya, 2003). Concurring, Alfa et al. (2015) succinctly declare that elections are the means through which the people exercise their sovereign right to choose who governs them and what the political and other priorities of their government should be. Elections are thus the opportunity for the people to express their sovereignty through the ballot to confer legitimacy to their government, renew its mandate if necessary or withdraw from it the authority to govern. In this context, one could posit that elections determine the rightful way of ensuring that responsible and responsive leaders assume the mantle of power to bring transformation in line with the dreams and longing aspirations of the people. Therefore, it was in this light that Political Bureau Report (1987) offered a lucid clarification and understanding of elections and electoral processes. The body states four basic conditions necessary for the holding and conduct of free and fair elections. These include:

- An honest competent, non-partisan administration to run elections.
- Enabling rules and regulations-Electoral laws;
- A developed system of political parties.
- An independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws.

5. Democracy and Good governance

Democracy is a form of government as well as a way of life, goal, ideal and philosophy which guarantees freedom of the majority and rights of the minority. Put simply, democracy could be seen as “a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively and is administered by them or by officials appointed by them, the common people; a state of society characterized by recognition of equality of rights and privileges for all people, political, social and legal equality with . . .” (Chambers, 2000), In the light of the above definition, one finds much semblance with the evergreen definition of the elder states man,

Abraham Lincoln (1861) who defines democracy as “the government of the people and by the people and for the people. By extension, the people exercise their governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. Put differently, in a normal democratic situation; power resides with the people and thereafter it is transferred to the leaders by the process of election which in theory also means that the leaders exercise the power in the interest of the people. Succinctly put, democracy implies majority rule and respect for fundamental rights of the people where certain tenets such as free elections, majority rule, and participation of political parties, unimpeachable judiciary and parliament are prominent features. Ntalaja (2000) succinctly explains democracy as a continuous process of promoting equal access to fundamental rights. Elucidating further, Okafor (1991) maintains that democracy is grounded on successful representation and participation of the people. Concurring, Nwoye (2001) avers that democracy signifies political system dominated by representatives either directly or indirectly chosen by the people. For Mbachu (1990), democracy is a way of life that involves freedom to make choices about what one does, where one lives, and how one uses one’s earnings; the operation of institutions- the home, the church, local, state and federal government; the right of justified property ownership; social justice and fairness, absence of social and class barriers, equality of opportunity; and the solution of common problems through the exercise of the free will of the people.

On the other hand, good governance is among other things, about being participatory, transparent, accountable and vital to economic growth through the eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainable development (Otoghile et al., 2014). Extending their submission, Otoghile et al. (2014) say good governance is also effective and equitable. This thesis is in accord with the position of UNDP (1997) that good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. Contributing, Nnamdi (2009) submits that good governance revolves around the structure and functioning of the state, its relationship with the civil society and its role in development. In a nutshell, good governance covers the exercise of authority blamelessly; the ability to identify and solve problems thereby halting conflicts, and ensuring high level of responsiveness to the needs and the interest of the general populace. Beautiful, educating and soul relieving as the discourse on democracy and good governance may be, the practice is far from being normal due to the domineering presence of neopatrimonial politics in the Nigerian society.

6. The concept of Neopatrimonialism in Nigeria

Nigeria politics has never been without the existence and practice of neopatrimonialism, but its conspicuous presence since the return of democracy (1999) has contrasted sharply with the roles played by the likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Aminu Kano, Michael Okpara, Tafawa Balewa, and others who were lionized, respected, idolized (Fawole, 2001). Admittedly, the existence of deified, highly respected and revered persons in the political arena added value and experience to governance. These noble persons were indeed the significant other in their different constituencies as their views were widely accepted

unquestioned. They were seen by their constituents as the conscience and custodian of all ethical, moral values and ideas. Nevertheless, they were often in the minority but commanded overbearing influence on the majority because they were seen as innovators and were also believed to possess requisite knowledge and expertise in the relevant societal spheres of interest to set appropriate standards. However, today, with the shift in attitude, many unscrupulous and unelectable individuals have become politically relevant thereby giving birth to the institutionalization of a cult of god-fathers masquerading as agent of change. Adeoye (2009) asserts that the practice of neopatrimonialism portrays the display of naked power in a highly competitive criminal world, as captured in the popular movie: *The Last Don*, which was based on a novel written by Mario Puzo. In a similar strand, Chimaroke Nnamani, the former governor of Enugu State, in reviewing the appalling presence of the practice of neopatrimonialism in Nigeria remarked that (Chimaroke, 2004:17):

The position of godfather in any system is like a virus, often out to create ill-will, but especially to subjugate the godson whom he planted and would want to do his will at all cost. The godson is placed in subservient position through his godfather The godfather is a merchant set out to acquire the godson as a client. The godfather is simply a self seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes.

Earlier, Audu (2006) sees the practice of neopatrimonialism as robbery of the people's mandate. Agreeing with Audu, Adeoye recalls with utter disgust the wanton destruction of lives and properties in the violent confrontation between a godfather (Chris Uba) and godson - then governor of Anambra state (Chris Ngige) over the latter refusal to surrender the state funds to the former as agreed in the pact (oath-taking in a shrine at Okija, Anambra State) that paved way for the godson's manipulated victory. This singular act, and others including that of the strong man of Ibadan politics, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu and his godson, Senator Rashidi Ladoja, then Governor of Oyo state between 2003 and 2007, in which the latter was forced out of office (Adeoye, 2009) for defaulting. Clearly, there exists an intercourse between neopatrimonialism and mafianism.

From the 'Wild-Wild West' experience of the First Republic and the truncated Second and Third Republics to the present democratic dispensation, neopatrimonialism has clearly shown manifestations of discontentment in the development of democracy in Nigeria. With the proliferation of small arms and light weapons which has become a common feature, democracy has suffered debilitating experiences as a result of electoral violence. Whether it is admissible or not, the intents to violently intimidate opponents in order to delay or otherwise influence an electoral victory against the wishes of the electorates have assumed epidemic proportions, becoming serious threats to democratic consolidation in today's Nigeria than ever before. As a virus, it is unfortunate that neopatrimonialism is still obvious in this 21st century Nigeria as a calculated business transaction that offensively demands that collective resources be shared in the ratio of 90 percent going to godfathers and 10 percent to the majority. Essentially, the practice of neopatrimonialism is an evil building block for corruption, retrogression, underdevelopment, mediocrity and backwardness (Adeoye, 2009). For Otoghile et al. (2014), a disproportionate amount of the nation's wealth has been taken over by a few to the detriment of achieving communal goals.

Conversely, the first generation godfathers were essentially benevolent and progressive. According to Abdullahi (2013), they served as a huge reservoir of wisdom and experience to be consulted on the business of governance. In a way, they were drawn by community sense of interest to influence the electorates to vote for some candidates of their choice, and it was enough satisfaction for them that they wielded tremendous influence in the society. This inevitably generated a groundswell of goodwill and reverence for them, as their views on political issues were scarcely contested in their respective regions of the country. However, all the attributes associated with the earlier godfathers have gone with the wind.

7. The concept of national security

National Security is an important concern in the life of a person, group or nation. Brown (1982) submitted that the concern for the security of a nation is undoubtedly as old as the nation-state itself. In other words, the central attribute in the quest for national security is the concern for the survival, peace and progress of the individuals, groups and the society as a whole. Obviously, from review of scholarly literature, one asserts that there is hardly any state devoid of the practice of neopatrimonialism and electoral violence.

For Oghi and Unumen (2014), national security is “the ability of a nation-state to, among other things, preserve the nation’s physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; preserve its nature, institutions, and governance from outside; and to control its borders” A key point to note is that the challenges of security arises from human interaction with other human beings and the society they live, but the increasing wave has never assumed the length and breadth it has today. Arms proliferation cum acquisition, possession and use has compounded the security situation in Nigeria, particularly during elections.

It is utmost that one understands that at the level of the nation, the security agencies, particularly in electoral processes, have had to contend with violent scheming and aggressive re-emergence of a new brand of god-fathers who perpetuate electoral violence and fraud ranging from double or multiple registrations cum voting, occasioning deliberate late arrival of election materials by electoral officials, stuffing/snatching of ballot boxes, destruction or hijacking of electoral materials, harassment and intimidation of opponents, falsification of results, delay in announcing results with no satisfactory explanation and other nefarious activities (Abdullahi, 2013).

From this point of convergence, it is clear an internal security issue often dovetailed into national security. This often occurs when the acclaimed winner widely acknowledged by both local and international election observers calls for assistance from the international community to intervene to restore his stolen mandate.

Available evidence suggests that unemployment is one of the fundamental developmental challenges facing Nigeria at the moment. Sadly enough, the mass unemployment of young people in Nigeria has created that continuously held impression that politics is the fastest yielding machinery to acquire instant riches and become instant celebrities with plenty of uncounted monies to squander even though the process contributes immensely to electoral violence. Several high profile killings with clear political overtones have occurred

during the course of the electioneering campaigns. Conservative figures of lives lost in Nigeria as a result of electoral violence activated by the practice of neopatrimonialism have been frightening. Despondently, the actual number of persons killed or maimed has not really been known and will of course, never be known for the singular reason that the country lacks independent investigators who will not be swayed by ethnocentric politics, sectional solidarity and primordial interests.

From the archives, it is important to recall that aside the 1983 gubernatorial election in Ondo State which infamously produced Akin Omoboriowo as governor under the platform of National Party Nigeria (NPN), the 2015 governorship election in Rivers State has been rated by political observers well above that of Ondo then, as the most deadly and frightening in nature. Not only were many unsuspecting youths used as pawns, many politicians were attacked and buildings burnt by unknown assailants. In Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, voters were faced with violence and intimidation. Most INEC offices in these states were burnt in protest. In Akwa-Ibom, electoral violence is not new; during the 2007 elections, some 127 Peugeot, 307 Salon Cars and 157 Keke NAPEP tri-cycles belonging to the state government were burnt. About 20 other vehicles belonging to well meaning Nigerians were equally burnt at different locations. About 51 suspects were arrested in connection to the political violence at Uyo (Akpan-Nsoh, 2011). It is also important to note that Akwa Ibom state was where an aspirant had his mother brutally assassinated to halt the ambition. Unfortunately, the security challenges that the country has faced since the dawn of the Twenty-first Century, especially since the upsurge of neopatrimonialism in electoral processes, seem to give the impression that the intelligence branch of the Armed Forces has been disconnected from reality. This is regrettable because the continuity of killings as has been experienced in the recent past portends nothing positive but grave danger to the Nigeria nation-state.

During 2015 general elections, the face-off between loyalists of the PDP and APC took a new dimension as the deaths recorded were not disclosed, but political observers alleged the number was significant enough to warrant the total cancellation of the elections. The campaign offices of the dominant parties (PDP and APC) were set ablaze at different strategic locations within the state. It was also in the same state that a Diaspora aspirant had his mother brutally assassinated. The same electoral violence was equally reported in almost all the northern states of the country such as Bauchi, Katsina, Niger, Plateau and most devastating was in Kano state where an electoral officer with his entire family was burnt alive for refusing to compromise. In Nasarawa, Benue, Taraba and other surrounding states, angry voters clashed with political thugs. In the Western states of Ogun, Oyo, Lagos, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti State, there was a confrontation between the PDP and APC supporters and election results were blatantly falsified in many areas as thugs beat up opposition party officials and hijacked ballot boxes.

8. Implications for Nigerian society

Given the availability of small arms procured by godfathers, free and fair elections have become a mirage. With this, the foundations of masses-driven governance have been consciously uprooted. As a result, neopatrimonialism has shattered the Nigerian political institutions, with the roles of electorates going

underground. Contemporary politics has become riotous, difficult to manage with anarchic patterns of operations and flagrant abuse of power. However, in disagreeing with godfathers, violence is employed to counter any dissident group. Thus, in sustaining this menace, godsons must become fantastically corrupt to satisfy the neck-breaking financial demands of godfathers. Corroborating this assertion, Shihata (1997) opines that corruption and patronage politics have weakened political institutions, and also serve as impediments to developments of new political activities thereby reducing economic growth. Adedeji (2009) laments that neopatrimonialism through violence has denied the people the opportunities of political participation. By extension, the dividends of democracy have remained the exclusive right of a select few and their thugs, while the downwardly mobile masses are kept yawning and jostling for survival in the midst of enormous Nigeria's wealth. In this mess, the complicity of the central government cannot be ignored as Wole Soyinka (2004) lamented that the greatest disservice erstwhile President, Olusegun Obasanjo did the nation was his practice and support for neopatrimonialism coupled with its illegalities, its naked violence, and its corruption.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

The practice of neopatrimonialism has facilitated the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons in the conduct of elections in Nigeria; it poses a significant challenge to law and order and also to personal security. Fundamentally, the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons has increased the rate of violence and this poses a significant challenge to law and order and also to personal security in the country to the extent the growth of democracy has been weakened. Substantiating this position, this paper argues that the availability of small arms of an unregulated international market into the hands of large youth populations with limited access to education or jobs has helped in no small measure to create chaos during elections. This paper, therefore, attempted a concise summation of the malevolence of neopatrimonialism in Nigeria. Conclusively, the modus operandi of contemporary godfathers in Nigeria is not desirable for political and sustainable development in Nigeria. In view of this, the paper recommends as follows:

- 1- The National Assembly should enact a law to restrict funds to be expended on each of the elective offices to checkmate the re-emergence of neopatrimonialism which is a threat to participatory democracy.
- 2- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be empowered by law to disqualify candidates sponsored by external force.
- 3- There should no longer be individuals who contravened electoral laws with reckless abandon. Government should not hesitate to clamp down on such individual irrespective of their ranks to serve as deterrent to others.
- 4- Again, traditional rulers should encourage peaceful elections in their different provinces to ensure individuals with questionable characters are promptly handed to law enforcement agencies. In addition, respect for human rights should be encouraged.

- 5- Government should be more proactive in ameliorating the deplorable living conditions of the people to checkmate them from becoming prawns. Elections results could be reasonably reduced if people are comfortable. Succinctly put, government should create sustainable jobs to redress the poor living conditions in the country thereby reducing the army of unemployed youths available to be recruited by godfathers to cause violence.
- 6- Concerted efforts should be made to reduce the proliferation and use of small arms in the conduct of elections. Such an approach should address both the small demand and supply aspects of the small arms problem. In other words, government should institute a voluntary freeze on arms trade and eliminate existing illegal stocks from society.
- 7- In practical terms, it is impossible to place a ban on the production and sale of small arms in the country because they perform some legitimate functions in the governance process. Based on this, government should rather improve and strengthen laws and regulations against small arms and light weapons.
- 8- Finally, all efforts should be made to re-orientate most up-coming political power seekers to desist from following the so-called godfathers to swearing oaths of alliance in shrines because of their own acute desperation for power as this has often led to violence and blood-letting.

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