

Political Clientelism in Nigerian Politics and the Paradigm Shift in the 2023 Oyo Gubernatorial Election

Arulogun, Caleb Feyisope

Department of Local Government and Development Studies, The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author Email: carulogun@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: Since it is in the nature of democracy and politics to seek power and control over the resources of the state, the political gladiators in Africa will use any means to secure victory and realize their selfish interests. Neoliberal scepticism about social solidarity, which views human action as motivated by self-interest and devoid of any moral basis, especially the problem of clientelism in politics, has often been examined by scholars. This is a challenge that both challenges Nigerian politics and makes African political elites uncompetitive in the global environment. Political clientelism almost forms a pattern of Nigerian political culture as it remains a 'big picture' in the country's electoral process. This paper therefore examines the extent of this debate in the recent general elections in the light of the paradigm shift in the governorship elections in Oyo State. A qualitative research design was mainly used for the study, i.e. secondary data was collected from newspapers, journals, magazines, etc. and the contents were analyzed. The findings show that political clientelism is a bane of Nigeria's development as it encourages the fielding of unpopular candidates who are unlikely to have the interest of the people at heart, which undermines the principle of freedom and fairness in an election. Therefore, it advocated coordinating efforts to persuade the populace through the work of civil society organizations while also bolstering government advocacy and democratic institutions of the state.

Keywords: Politics, clientelism, election, State

INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of new democracies of Africa, the struggle for power have been largely defined by the hydra-headed phenomena of godfatherism, clientelism, violence and all form of shenanigan (Albert, 2005; Omotola, 2010). Liberal democratic theorists have argued that multi-party democratic electoral contests, presupposes that the ultimate power to decide who governs resides with the people. Liberal democracy as a system of government is seen in a minimal and procedural fashion as a political system where multiple political parties are in competition to take control of the government by contesting in free and fair elections (Adebiyi, 2021). This ideological foundation of liberal democracy hails from Western thought, and liberal democracy has been seen as the only, irrefutably good form of government.

Since the inception of Fourth Republic in Nigeria, the phenomenon of political clientelism has been particularly pervasive in the politics and governance of the country. To be sure, any objective analysis of political scientists about politics and governance in Nigeria is incomplete without adequate attention being paid to the political patrons and the political clients.

The reality of contemporary Nigerian politics is such that, the right bestowed on the people by democracy to choose who represents them in free, fair and credible elections has been eroded by political entrepreneurs which usually manifests through clientelism construct. These phenomena have permeated the political spaces of Nigeria's new democracies. Van de Walle (2001) argued that attainment of political authority in Africa and specifically Nigeria is conditioned by involvement in clientele networks and relationships which permeates the entire gamut of its states.

However, liberal democracy and political clientelism have not taken Nigeria, including Oyo state, anywhere. This is so because of the continuous influence of neocolonialism which causes the loss of internal control. The trend of such loss of internal economic control is deeply ironic and carries with it potentially explosive political consequences. Among these consequences are the surge of ethnic hatred, competition, ethnic favouritism and nepotism that are visible in Nigeria's democracy (Oyedeji, Alhassan, Ayodele, and Ogunrinde, 2019). Globalization, appropriation of power and inter-elite confrontation are contrary to the genuine interests of the

people of the world (Sankatsing 2004 cited in Oyedeji et al, 2019).

This study examines political clientelism in Nigerian politics with special attention on gubernatorial elections in Oyo state, Nigeria and the paradigm shift in 2023 edition of the election. The main objective is to attempt a qualitative exploration of political behaviors of the actors in Oyo state politics especially during gubernatorial electoral processes since 1999 till 2023 and their implications on the state's political and democratic posterity. The paper is divided into five sections. It started by a general background to the study, the paper attempts a conceptual and theoretical overview of political clientelism and election. The paper proceeds to an exploration of Oyo state experience from 1999-2019 with the view of investigating and analyzing the paradigm shift in the 2023 gubernatorial election. The last part dwells on implications of clientelism in Oyo state politics and thereafter a succinct conclusion is drawn.

The study focused on Oyo state. Oyo state was selected given its centrality to politics in the South-west geo-political zone. This is derivable from the fact that Oyo state houses Ibadan which was the capital of the old Western Region of Nigeria. Though, gubernatorial elections have taken place in Oyo state prior to 2023 general elections which is the main focus of the study. The idea is borne out of the state's experience in terms of godfather politics or political patronage which largely orchestrated violent governorship elections in the state since 1999. According to Bello (2015), since 1999, the state witnessed high level electoral violence and intense godfatherism highly characterized by patron-clients relations.

Political clientelism, politics and election: a review of relevant literatures

The literature is fertile with definitions of political clientelism. Some definitions tend to associate the phenomenon with democracy or democratization. A contemporary analysis of political clientelism by Susan Stokes was based primarily on European and recent Latin American political science literature and barely mentioned are the African literatures or the anthropological and sociological sources that have been so influential for understanding of the concept further. Focusing on the impact of formal electoral rules on these practices, Stokes defined clientelism as "the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?" (Stokes, 2013:605). This definition emphasizes that clientelism exists on a progressive hierarchical level-playing ground of politics and is exemplified by patronages. At one end of the process is the patron and at the other is the client. The patron occupies a top position on the hierarchy while the

client's position is subservient. Thus, clientelism entails a dyadic relationship between the patron and the client. Such dyadic relations according to Hicken (2011) are based on practical and physical dealings between the two, hence the definition of clientelism as "instrumental friendship" (Scott, 1972:92). The term has also been perceived as "a long term relationship between two people of unequal status who have relatively regular personal interactions" and exchange of "goods and services" (Hilgers, 2011:570).

In an attempt to critic Hicken submission of clientelism as dyadic relations, Berenschot and Aspinall (2020) observed that studies of clientelism in the 1960s and 1970s have not yielded enough empirical observation as regards the extent the practice of clientelism varies among political systems. To them, it was because most scholars commonly perceived clientelism as a dyadic relationship between a patron and a client characterized by hierarchy and subservience. Clientelism therefore, connotes "the practice of exchanging a targeted, non-policy based and contingent provisions of material benefits such as money, jobs, public services and government contracts for political and electoral support such as votes, campaign funding and other forms of campaign support" (Berenschot and Aspinall, 2020:4)

Another explanation by Remi Aiyede is that modern political institutions did not upturn pre-colonial values and traditional ways of doing things in African politics. Patronage, tribute, kinship and other relationships continue to exist and permeate these modern political institutions and structures of government and sometimes overwhelm them. Others argue that Africa's postcolonial leaders have been able to subvert modern institutions by clientelism, use of state resources for political legitimation in support of their preference for personalized rule.(Aiyede,2023;114).In consonance with Aiyede's submission, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development-UNRISD's report observed that clientelism undermines democracy; electoral reforms such as redistricting disenfranchised voters by minimizing the impact of their vote and in effect isolating them from political processes (UNRISD:2022). Despite the variation of argument on political clientelism by scholars, an inherent component of the concept is an inbuilt relationship of power between patrons and clients. It is logical to argue that the patron has a monopoly of power, since he is the one who provides material resources. It is however necessary to note that clients too exercise an enormous amount of power in the exchange relationship through the non-material resources they control. Indeed, the patron may control power over state and productive resources, but he requires the loyalty of clients to consolidate it (Omobowale, 2008). This submission makes it clear that Political clientelism is a widespread phenomenon in Nigerian politics. It refers to a system in which politicians use their power and resources to distribute favors and benefits to their supporters and

Table 1: Arguments in favour or against political clientelism in Nigerian politics

Argument in favour	Arguments against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It enables integration of immigrants as well as citizens with low levels of political literacy and into politics. • It articulates local–regional-national relations thus contributing to consolidate the political community. • It levels off growing demands from citizens in relation to the low capacity of response of the state by allowing brokers to make a more effective use of the limited state resources (process of natural selection by quid pro quo exchanges). • It helps parties to consolidate electoral support and thus plays a role in their institutionalization and legitimization in society • It helps state institutions to develop natural resistance and further the creation of controls and accountability. • Like corruption, it “greases the wheel of the system”. It allows an obstructive and inefficient state to function (despite being unjust or selective); • It helps to develop an expedient and creative political class (it promotes political entrepreneurialism); • It is a substitute for other forms of political domination by means of violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is dysfunctional and raises instability to systems of legitimization: it is selective in its redistributive approach (it may be a short term solution to some, i.e those who can mobilize their social capital, but it becomes a long terms problem to all); • It hinders citizens’ trust in institution by inflicting negatively in the ethical standards governing modern public life (such as transparency, impartiality, accountability, fairness, etc) and generates cynicism. • It violets citizens’ rights, in particular the universal and equal access to the state. • It represents a cost to the public purse leading to the embezzlement of funds; overpricing of public works; and biased bidding for public works which often disregards value-for-money considerations • It reduces government efficacy by increasing public spending and making government hostage to their clientele. • It produces s political class with a low sense of public good and irresponsible with regard to the management of public resources. • It hinders the modernization of bureaucracy by leading to over employment and under-qualified personnel in the public administration

Sources: Luis, (2008)

constituents in exchange for political loyalty and support. Clientelism is often characterized by a personalized relationship between the patron (the politician) and the client (the beneficiary of political patronage).

According to Omobowale (2008), in his proverbial analysis that is connected to patron-client relationships in Yoruba social thought, he addresses the positive values the ‘baba-Isale’ as patron portray in order to secure the loyalty of the client. To him, aside from providing goods, the patron is expected to be exemplar in his character, all of which is embedded in the social values of ‘Iwa, Ihuwasi, Ilesi and Ajumose’(character, behavior, attitude and collective responsibility). Once a patron has exemplified these ideals, which are relevant to the

consolidation of the social order, he would be recognized as an ‘omoluabi’ (Virtuous being) and the services he extends to the clients would be significant. This study shows a cordial communal relationship among the Yoruba social group (Omobowale 2008).

Derrick (2020) defines clientelism as a "patron-client relationship that is characterized by the principle of reciprocity, which is a self-regulatory approach anchored on mutual exchange of trust and expected returns." The emphasis on this type of client-patron relationship makes it particularistic and intimate, focusing primarily on personal interests rather than the general good. Clientelism essentially entails an asymmetrical yet shared relationship based on power and exchange. Therefore,

there is selective access to public resources, depriving others of the same access.

In essence, patrons (Godfathers) are powerful individuals who determine “who, what, when and how” in the corridors of political power. Many godfathers in the present-day Nigeria operates like the mafia by displaying similar violent scheming and aggressive ‘politicking’ coupled with manipulative devices of having their ways by any means (Onubi, 2002). They rely on Machiavelli’s slogan, “the ends justify the means” (Onubi, 2002).

Therefore, the (Table 1) below further describes the major debate in favour and against the existential reality of clientelism in Nigeria politics.

Table 1 above presented the prospect and challenges of political clientelism to the Nigeria modern society. For instance, it argued that clientelism enables integration of citizens with low levels of literacy and immigrants into politics. Meanwhile, we can further inquire to know if the constitutional functions of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) are different from this. Also, it argued that clientelism articulates local-regional-national relations thus contributing to cement the political community. Enquiry can also be made to see if this role is not different from the duties of INEC and the media.

Theoretical framework

The importance of theoretical framework to a study is pigeon-hold in the fact that social science research is theory-based and its operations are guided by relevant principles of human behaviour (Goode and Hatt, 1952). Hence, this study is anchored on elite theory. The thrusts of elite theory are that, all men love power; men are not endowed alike; inequality rather than equality defines the fact of life; and that ‘government by the people’ is nothing but a ruse. While it could be admitted that government is for the people, it cannot and will never be by the people (Agagu, 2014:39). In every society there is, and must be a minority which rules over the rest of society, and this minority forms the political class or governing elite composed of those who occupy the posts of political offices and more regularly those who can directly influence political decisions.

Generally, elite theory consists of a number of variants including political elite, economic elite, religious elite and bureaucratic elite (Agagu, 2014). The popular apostles of this theory includes; Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels, Wright Mills, and Harold Lasswell. Gaetano opined that in every branch of human activity each individual is given an index which stands as a sign of his capacity, very much the way grades are given in the various subjects in examinations in school (Suenu, 2004, Nkwede, 2014). According to Suenu, an elitist correlation to the understanding of clientelism is very apt. He sees political clientelism as being synonymous with elitism. As much, elites in the political spheres are known in Nigerian context as godfathers. They are the ones who

govern, and are known as the ‘kingmakers’, they are notable and often seen as strongmen who control politics in their different domains. Apparently, in a political environment where godfatherism is in vogue, individuals are colonized by the godfathers. Put differently, godfathers rule by proxies (Joseph, Ibeogu and Nwankwo, 2014). The relevance of this theory is the interconnectivity that exists in the explanation of political clientelism and election.

Clientelism and Oyo State politics: analysis of history

This phenomenon of godfatherism is not totally new in Nigerian politics and particularly Oyo state as some of our nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, etc, are somehow related as typifying the modern-day operations of the political godfathers. Since then, political clientelism has not disappeared, but it has changed in form and function as a result of the socio-political characteristics of Nigerian state, for instance, high levels of social inequality (van de Walle 2009). The Fourth Republic in Nigeria has witnessed these phenomenon rights from inception soon after the Governors were sworn-in in 1999. The political actors and their political godfathers were in the verge of contending “who is who” in their respective states.

As observed by Omotola (2007: 139), “patron-client relationship in Oyo Democracy particularly in its past system of administration was distributive”. To him, it is historically deeply rooted based on cultural values of the society, where it is purely socio-economic in nature and mutually productive for the beneficiaries. Its politicization would appear to have contributed to the criminalization of politics. For instance Yoruba has a well-institutionalized and centralized system where the godfather is well known and respected (chiefs and Obas). Godfathers reign across all spheres of the society: academics, legal, and religious environment (Abdullahi and Tunde, 2013). It must be noted that the patron-client relationship in Oyo state has a long history. In Oyo state for instance, the Late Alafin of Oyo (king) once claimed that he is responsible for the installation of any political leader who will govern the state (Osakede and Ijimakinwa, 2016). This simply connotes that the power of traditional system and rulers has not been removed from Nigerian political culture. The people tend to be more loyal to their patron because they believe they are closer to their patrons than a political delegate as designed by liberal democracy.

More pronounced in Oyo State history was the tussle between Late Lamidi Ariyibi Adedibu, the “kingmaker” of Oyo Politics (godfather) and his (godson), the former governor of the State, Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja. At inception of the fourth republic, clientelism and violence in Oyo state revolved around Chief Lamidi Adedibu who in the early 1950s started as a political errand boy to First Republic politicians such as: Chief Augustus Adisa

Akinloye and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, were the commander of thugs for politicians (Human Rights Watch, 2007). By the end of 1980s, Chief Adedibu had developed into a strong political figure whose powers manifested, particularly in the Fourth Republic in Oyo state through clientelism. While Adedibu's style of politics was deeply embedded in thuggery and violence such that he was described as notorious and a threat to political stability in Oyo state (Bello, 2015), his political prowess was derived from his ability to mobilize violence and support for any candidate he pulls his weight behind in an election, hence his perception as the "strongman of Ibadan politics" (Adebiyi, 2018).

However, Lam Adesina's emergence as the governor of Oyo state in 1999 without the support of Lamidi Adedibu should not come to many as a surprise. This was because as at the time the election was held the All Peoples Party (APP) which Adedibu belonged to was no longer popular, not only in Oyo state, but the entire South West. After the 1999 governorship election, Adedibu left the APP to join the PDP. This, coupled with his cordial relationship with the then President Olusegun Obasanjo turned him into a political king marker in the state (Animasawun, 2013).

In 2003, Adedibu claimed to have contributed financially in "installing" Ladoja as the governor, with an agreement that the governor will be loyal and submissive, taking orders from him and to subject public resources, to his private whims (Osakede and Ijimakinwa, 2016; Adebiyi, 2018). Their patron-client relationship was so obvious that scholars like Adebiyi (2018) believes that the process by which Ladoja emerged as the PDP flag bearer was largely undemocratic.

Ladoja however reneged and refused to play according to the rules of the game. To Ladoja, Adedibu demanded the payment of 25% of the state's security vote to him every month which he never did. Also, Ladoja did not allow any input of Adedibu into the list of commissioners who will serve in his cabinet (Human Rights Watch, 2007). This culminated into the mayhem witnessed in Oyo state after 2003 elections till January 2006. Many lives and properties were lost; the State House of Assembly was also polarized along the two divides and led to the suspension of fourteen members out of thirty-two members of the House of Assembly.

Subsequently, Ladoja was impeached in January 2006 to pave way for his deputy, AlaoAkala (now late), another willing godson (client), who is eager to serve the godfather better (Oyekanmi, 2011). The status quo was maintained till December 7th 2006 final ruling of the apex court (Supreme Court) that his removal was illegal and was reinstated after eleven months out of his office. His coming back to the office was faced with serious resistance from his 'former godfather's' (Lamidi Adedibu) camp, which led to break in law and order of the state capital for few days and living many innocent citizens with various kind of injuries (Azeez, 2014; Osakede and

Ijimakinwa, 2016). Moreover, Adebayo Alao-Akala through the help of Lamidi Adedibu was adopted as the PDP gubernatorial flag bearer for the 2007 Oyo state governorship. Before the election, Alao-Akala provided justification for Adedibu's style of politics when he stated in an interview with Human Rights Watch:

"For God's sake, this man is an old man, you cannot reform him, you can only manage him. This man has been in politics since politics began in Nigeria. Can you just wish him away like that? If you go to his house you will see pictures of all the past leaders he has worked with. Chief Adedibu has sponsored everybody, everybody who is who and who in Oyo state politics has passed through that place. This man belongs to an old school of thought. If, for example, he asked me, Mr. Governor, I want you to kill this one tomorrow I would say, "Yes, sir." Then I would go back the following day and say, "Why do you want us to kill that man?" Then I will provide another solution, we will not kill him, let us bring him to order. If he asked me for N100, I will say, "Yes, sir." But then the next day, I will say, "Baba, I am sorry, I don't have the N100, here is N20 for you to manage" (Human Rights Watch, 2007: 62).

By Implication, Alao-Akala indicated that unlike Ladoja who failed to fulfill his promises to his then godfather, he was ready to be faithful of his godfather who orchestrated his victory at the polls. Unlike the previous elections in the state where godfathers largely decide who becomes anything, Oyo State seems to be different since the demise of Lamidi Adedibu, the famed proponent of "Amala" politics (Abimboye, 2015). But one cannot rule out the influence of heavyweights like former Justice Minister, Richard Akinjide; Second Republic governor, Omololu Olunloyo; Ajibola Afonja, among others in determining who becomes the governor of the state in 2011 and 2015.

Political clientelism and 2023 gubernatorial election in Oyo State

This clientelistic notion in Oyo State denotes that the patron is not an ordinary financier of political campaigns but they are individuals whose power stems not just from wealth but from their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate central, State or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor. Oluloyo (2014) observed that "godfathers demand a substantial degree of control over the government in order to shape government policy, but to exact direct financial return in the form of government resources stolen by their portages or awarded to them as further opportunities for graft". The uniqueness of 2023 governorship election in Oyo state was that one cannot obviously perceive the phenomenon of patron-client

relationship as it was in the previous elections in the state (Premium Times, 2023). In this respect, Governor 'Seyi Makinde, the winner of the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Oyo publicly argued that he has no godfather, asserting that godfathers in the state are free to back whosoever they like, in the poll of 2023. Makinde (2023) emphasized that "the people of Oyo State own me, not a godfather". Sequel to this however, it is worth noting that the current governor of Oyo State, Seyi Makinde, has been vocal enough about his position on godfatherism and has promised to resist any attempt to impose a godfather on the state's politics. But this study has established that godfatherism is the scourge of corruption in Nigeria. Though, there is a recurring pattern of ex-governors desiring to remain influential as policy-makers and economic drivers in their state, Ukor (2022) argues that such ex-governors' desires tend to impose on the extant governor who may have gotten his seat on the back of his predecessor. This is a feature of political clientelism and this is rampant in Nigerian as a polity. Having being deeply rooted in political behavior of Nigerians, clientelism still thrives in some states but not in the politics of Oyo state, at least in the 2023 gubernatorial election. But the confidence and wits seen in Seyi Makinde might be replicated soonest in other states. Therefore, as for the 2023 Oyo State governorship election, it is difficult to identify clientelism or trace any political behavior ascribed to godfatherism in either the buildup to the election process or the paraphernalia campaigns of the winner of the election, Seyi Makinde. Also, it cannot be established literature-wise if any of the governorship contestants in the election had a patron.

CONCLUSION

The study has established that democracy in Nigeria has not been fully institutionalized in as much as the clientelistic attitude of Nigerian politician has threatened democratic process and the socio-economic lives of the citizenry most especially, the political institutions. Political clientelism is a syndrome in Oyo state political process militating against democratic institution in order to satisfy the selfish interest of both the patron and the client. The activities of these political juggernauts have denied the citizenry of electing their preferred candidates as their leader. The responses of the political juggernauts can also be seen in the context of one preferring patronage at the expense of policy (Hyden, 2006). Issues arising from our clientelistic political behavior are such that a political office holder is expected to use his office personally in order to maintain his political patron. 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 electorates in the past elections in Oyo (Oluloyo, 2014).

In the light of the above analysis, this study strongly recommends that democratic institutions should be further strengthened in Oyo state so as to consolidate the change experienced in the 2023 Oyo gubernatorial election in respect to client-patron relationship. Political parties should promote party discipline with their rule; ideology and regulation which should be strictly adhered to by members of the party. Also, the civil-based organizations as well as the socio-cultural groupings in the nation should, as matter of urgency, wake up to the challenge of imposition of political candidates through the threshold of godfatherism as it is still pronounced in Nigerian politics. It is also recommended that the 'Electoral Acts' should be reviewed to capture more factors of disqualification of political candidates whose candidature is questionable on seeming grounds of patron-client relationship as this portends danger or violence to the electioneering process and undermines election outcomes. Finally, stakeholders in Nigeria electoral process such as the government, Judiciary, election management body, electoral institutes, civil society, and religious institutions should vigorously be committed to strengthening the democratic system by raising awareness on right political culture to stimulate attitudinal construct and positive political behavior in our society.

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