

# Godfatherism, Party Opposition, Party Coalition, and Party Disunity in Nigeria: A Study of Kwara State from 1999 to 2015

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## Abstract

*The article investigates the action and character that surrounded electing leaders in Kwara State, Nigeria. From the research findings of related studies reviewed in the present paper, it is argued that leadership selection in Nigeria is determined by political godfathers. In Kwara State, which is the case study in this article, political participation and contestation were often determined and controlled by Senator Abubakar Olusola Saraki. After the death of Olusola Saraki, his son, Senator Bukola Saraki became the political leader. The godfather-son relationship is instrumental in hand-picking electoral candidates that are loyal to the patron-client system. This is because the electoral candidates that contested for the position through the godfather/leader always won elections through their political networks. However, recently, the struggle for power among the elites has made the contestation for leadership positions intense. Over the years, the incumbent political party has either decamped to a new party or formed a grand coalition with the opposition political parties because of party internal disputes. The article submits that the unethical patron-client practice has largely frustrated the democratic process between 1999 and 2015. The effort of the opposition political parties to take over power from the incumbent party (then PDP) has been met with frustration, especially with the slow and poor judgment from the Electoral Tribunal Courts. In view of this, there is a strong political opposition after the inauguration of democracy in Kwara State but the electoral power has not been changed within the period. Therefore, the findings from the respondents were analysed by the data gathered from the survey and interview schedule.*

**Keywords:** Political Godfather, Kwara State, Political Elite, Political Party, and Election

## INTRODUCTION

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With the embracement of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, scholars have beamed their research searchlights on the democratic practices and abuse of democratic principles by elected leaders. This has illuminated the characters that are working to promote as well as challenge democracy in the country, particularly, in Kwara State. The politics of electoral contestation and participation has interacted with internal (state) and national issues. Therefore, electoral power is instrumental to the process of leadership selection, and its stakeholders are classified into three: the power holders (the incumbent party), the power takers (the opposition parties), and the power givers (the electorates) Liobowitz and Ibrahim (2013). In view of these elements, democracy is feasible with high expectations of the people after the election in the state.

Bratton and Van de Walle (1998) argued that political parties are the means by which the electoral system shaped the opinions of the people on leadership selection. Gill (2000) agreed with Bratton and Van de Walle that democracy is a potential vehicle for the electorates to participate in politics as well as a channel for making a popular choice through elections.

The mobilisation of the people for politics in Kwara State usually connects with the activities of political elites and other individuals in different political classes. This involves electoral campaigns. The activities of the elite in Kwara State virtually reflected the action of the power holders and power seekers as both rely on the electorates in the first-past-the-post election (Abdullahi & Tunde, 2013). This democratic process shows how the opposition political parties struggle for power and how the incumbent party prevents them from taking their turn. In this study, one of the research questions is: what are the characteristics of the Nigerian democratic process that are reflected in Kwara politics? Tinubu (2011), aptly said that:

There are many people who are all too willing to take advantage of the democratic process. They advocate democracy up to the point of gaining power and no further. Once in power, they eagerly whittle down the very democratic mechanisms that enabled their political ascent. Upon making it to the rooftop, they kick aside the ladder to prevent others from making a similar climb. Nigerian democracy is not yet strong enough to have corralled these errant forces. Actors with democratic phenotypes but authoritarian genotypes abound in the current political landscape. I dare say Nigeria has more of this ilk than genuine democrats. If not kept under the watchful eye, these personalities will deface what already is a sparse edifice. We are positioned at the fulcrum where Nigeria is as likely to incline toward artificial democracy as it is toward the real specimen

The ex-governor of Lagos State observed that the incumbent political party often prevented opposition political parties from taking power and this practice also manifested in Kwara politics. The politics of Kwara State was basically won by the autonomous political party i.e. the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which unconstitutionally blocked the opposition political parties from taking their turn. Lukman (2010) described the aftermath of the founding (first) elections in Kwara State with the phrase 'a clash of the titans' among the political gladiators in the successive elections. However, the pattern of politics was drawn from the old-guard politicians of

the defunct Second Republic of 1979. Presently, the old politicians took leadership roles and involve the elites in different capacities in the country.

In a democracy, the party that loses an election could re-contest in future elections (Huntington, 1991). Ismail (2011) succinctly supported the view that the opposition political parties are a mechanism for achieving electoral values under the process of open competition and he further stated that:

Credible political opposition also means an opposition that is competent enough to influence governmental policy; avoids electoral fraud and violence during election; spread the gospel of democracy as well as an opposition that will not relax after losing an election and continue to strive until and after taking over the government lawfully.

In a democracy, unrelenting opposition parties check the incumbent party against the abuse of offices in the state. The participation of the incumbent power and opposition parties in elections appeals to the deepening of democracy with a reflection of accountability. Therefore, party opposition in Kwara State is an instrument for challenging the incumbent party in various political situations. Meanwhile, the opposition political parties cannot relent in their struggle to take their turn in the State. Any form of relaxation may give room for the incumbent political party to abuse power at various levels.

The struggle for power by the opposition parties in Kwara State had resulted in a series of cases heard at the electoral tribunal in 2007, between Gbenga Toyosi Olawepo (Petitioner, Democratic People's Party [DPP]) and Dr. Bukola Saraki (Respondent, Peoples Democratic Party [PDP]). Similarly, in 2011, it was between Muhammed Dele Belgore, Engineer Joshua Babatunde Adeyinka, and the Action Congress of Nigeria [ACN] (Petitioners, ACN), and Abdulfatai Ahmed, Peter Kishira, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the Respondents (2016). These legal tussles showed the perseverance of political opposition, the DPP and ACN as opposition political parties that contested against the incumbent party (PDP) between 2007 and 2011.

### **Elite Theory**

The elite theory of power was advanced in the early twentieth century by three famous sociologists, such as Pareto, Moscal, and Mitchell. The term elite, as a category of sociological analysis, was introduced by Pareto while the idea associated with this theory was floated earlier by Moscal. Elite theory accepts a broad division of society into dominant and independent groups. But unlike class theory, elite theory treated the division as somewhat natural. It regards competence and aptitude (not the emergence of private property) to be responsible for division. While the class theory holds that the division of society into dominant and independent classes could be set aside for a socialist revolution (Bachrach, 1967).

The term elite is derived from French where it means to be something excellent. Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian sociologist, used the term elite to indicate a superior social group. However, elite refers to the group of people who show the highest ability in their field of activity; whatever its nature may be. It is a minority group that takes all major decisions in the society. The other part of society which falls short of this level of ability is termed as the mass of the people, or masses. The Masses are characterised by the lack of qualities of leadership and the fear of responsibility. They feel that it will be safe to follow the elite class (Jachen, 1998).

Furthermore, within the elite, Pareto distinguished between the governing elite and the non-governing elite. The governing elite wields power for the time being while the non-governing elite constantly endeavours to replace it by showing greater ability and excellence. In short, the behaviour of the elite is characterised by constant competition between the governing and non-governing elites. This results in what is called the circulation of elites (Desahouwer & Luther, 1999). In any case, the masses may have no chance of entering the ranks of the elites. Apart from intelligence and talent, Pareto also recognised courage and cunningness as the qualities of elites. He observed that the lions are more suited to the maintenance of the status quo under stable conditions, while the foxes are adaptive and innovative and cope better during periods of change (Gill, 2000).

Mosca was also an Italian sociologist. He noted that the ruling class was necessarily divided into two groups, such as the rulers and the ruled. The ruling class controls most of the wealth, power, and prestige in society (Gaubu, 2003). The ruled are not competent to replace it. Whatever form of government might be adopted, it is always this minority that exercises all powers in society. Mosca defined the ruling class

as a political class that represents the interest of the important and influential groups, especially in a parliamentary democracy (Peter, 1967). In any case, the ruling class tends to invoke moral and legal principles to win the consent of the ruled. Pareto regarded intelligence and talent as the outstanding qualities of elites, Mosca's ruling class was distinguished by its capacity of the organisation. Of the two Italian elitists, Mosca was more democratic because he mentioned that political leadership could emerge at all levels including the grass roots level. Each stratum of society has the potential of producing good organisers for itself. They need not look for outsiders for guidance and control (Gaub, 2003).

Mosca argued again that the dominance of the ruling class was essential to provide for the proper organisation of the unorganised majority. Members of the ruling minority always enjoy a high degree of esteem in the eyes of the people because of their outstanding qualities. Mosca also held that constant competition between the upper and lower strata of society leads to the circulation of elites. Again, the class theory held that the division of society into classes was based on exploitation; elite theory believed that the division of society into elite and masses was functional (Tachau, 1975). They compensate each other in sustaining the societal organisation. The division does not give rise to any injustice in society. Hence, the masses need not rise in revolt against the ruling class. Under this system social change, if any, would be confined to the circulation of elites. In this process, an out-mode elite may replace by a more dynamic elite, but the masses will have no opportunity to come to power.

More so, the elite theory was discussed by Mitchell who propounded the 'iron law of oligarchy'. He proceeded to explain that every organisation, whatever their original aims, is eventually reduced to oligarchy, that is, the rule of the chosen few. He held that the majority of human beings are apathetic, indolent, and slavish. They are permanently incapable of self-government. So, they have to bank on their leaders to pursue their social objectives. Trade unions, political parties, and other organisations are vehicles of such leadership. Mitchell pointed out that any organisation may be set up with democratic aims, but as the organisation grows in size and complexity, its management is left to professional experts. In due course, these experts or leaders become indispensable for the organisation. They use their manipulation skills, including oratory, persuasion, and playing upon the sentiments of the people to perpetuate themselves in power (Gaub, 2003).

## The Governing Elites Versus Opposition Political Parties

Elections come periodically with the primary goal of changing the electoral positions in the federation of the country. The rationale for instituting political opposition in a democracy is legitimate. Huntington (1991) described the legitimacy of the electoral procedure as an instrument for maintaining the quality of democracy. As the ruling party loses power legitimacy, the opposition parties replace it with an alternative government (change). Therefore, the electorates are the procedural authority that translates the state's power to formal institutions as well as change leadership in any democratic setting. Egbewole and Etudaiye (2010) averred that, in liberal democracy, campaign promises and leadership performance are factors that motivate the electorates as well as determine the winners and losers in elections. In elections, both the winners and losers contest under a free and fair election without crisis. In Nigeria, politics has regularly brought about the antagonist camp and protagonist political parties who struggled for power. This was apparent in Kwara State in the 2003 gubernatorial elections as the incumbent party, PDP, and the opposition political party, ANPP, clashed in the state. Olowojolu (2015) expressed that ANPP, AD, and PDP were recognized as foundational political parties and the party system has not compromised the democratic order in the country.

In Kwara State, each political party mobilises and recruits party members and this facilitated the process of leadership selection at various levels. The question is: how are political parties formed in Kwara State? Apparently, the political parties were formed by the association of elites at the state and national levels. The association of elites converged their electoral interests in the corridor of power with the hope of creating a political network in the federation. Naanen (2015) described Nigerian practices as a synergy of one-party hegemony retaining power with authoritarian action which translated into dictatorship. 'Big-man' politics has actually diminished the choices of the electorates in the decision-making process. Relating to a similar case, Animashaun (2010) argued that the 2003 elections were excessively rigged in the thirty-six states of the country. In this election, PDP claimed overwhelming seats across the federation. This includes Kwara State where Bukola Saraki emerged as the governor in 2003 in the governorship election.

The electoral success of Bukola Saraki in 2003 and his re-election in 2007 was queried by the major opposition political party. The government was run between 2003

and 2011, at the end of the tenure, he contested for a seat in the Kwara Central Constituency to the National Assembly for the Senate membership. The success of the election was also challenged at the Electoral Tribunal by Dr. Ibrahim Yahaya Oloriegbe (opposition candidate from Action Congress of Nigeria [ACN]) in 2011. Senator Bukola Saraki was reported to have hand-picked Governor Abdulfatai Ahmed as a trusted political successor under PDP in 2011 as well as under APC in the 2015 gubernatorial election. Although there was no party primary to determine the winner of the PDP, rather the circulation of the party members is always the responsibility of the political leader/godfather.

Ibrahim (2012) mentioned the character of Iliasu who was a regular member of the Kwara State House of Assembly between 2007 and 2015. The Honourable member filed a petition against the Speaker of the House, Honourable Rasak Atunwa, on the mismanagement of the State's account. He stated in the petition that "the leader, Senator Bukola Saraki, retained some of us for certain purposes. We were probably asked to come back because of the experience we had gained in the course of our last tenure".

Apart from this, Herald (2014) reported the views of Hassan Oyeleke, a member of the Kwara State House of Assembly that Senator Bukola Saraki was the leader of the state. It also added that the political views of Senator Bukola Saraki that there is no go area for the PDP members after decamping to APC in 2014. The Commissioner for Information and Communication in Kwara State, Prince Tunji Moronfoye, disclosed that the defection of the Kwara State political leader, Senator Bukola Saraki, from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to All Progressive Congress (APC) was in the interest of the entire people of Kwara State (Herald, 2014).

At this juncture, Senator Bukola Saraki won his constituency election to qualify for Senate membership in 2011 and Alhaji Abdulfatai Ahmed also won the gubernatorial election the same year. However, both winners witnessed election Tribunal litigations filed against them by the opposition party, ACN. The electoral victories were challenged with allegations of excessive electoral malpractices, which ranged from rigging, party intimidation, multiple votes, falsification of results through INEC, and a host of others. Regardless of this, Abdulfatai Ahmed was re-elected in 2015. The dictatorship in Kwara State was a reflection of the de-democratisation because the same set of people retained power among themselves. The justification of the practice was described in the reports of the respondents interviewed across the 24

local governments in the state. Ibrahim (2012) submitted that as legislators, they are expected to be extraordinary, honest, transparent, and prudent in the day-to-day running of the Assembly. As lawmakers and custodians of the constitution, members should shun any act that are detrimental to the members as well as the well-being of the generality of the people in their constituencies.

Democracy is enterprising when people have a say in the government. The lawmakers are instrumental in the affair of the state in the policy-making processes. Therefore, each member of the Legislative House should abide by the rules and regulations. This can be achieved by promoting the interest of the people they serve through their constituencies. However, party opposition in the legislative arm of government responds to adequate accountability. In the case of Kwara State, the institution is weak due to a party claiming an overwhelming majority in the house.

### **Party Disunity**

Party disunity was a feature of the political institutions in the country. Basically, the political behaviour of the elite groups in the party is justified by peoples' attitudes towards certain political issues. Party disunity refers to the institutional division which leads to crisis and each political member in the party protects their position. Party disunity also occurs when the members of the party grow power asymmetrically in the organisation (Gill, 2000). Therefore, post-electoral issues are required for justification. The transition to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 and its aftermath have generated political issues at various levels, particularly, among the power holders, opposition parties, and the electorates (voters), sometimes, other political parties.

In this case, democracy is not only witnessing crises but is being threatened by political erosion caused by party disunity. Gill (2000) described party disunity as a split that results from a clash of political interests on issues that are peculiar to leadership selection. Therefore, the process of selecting credible leaders is confined to each political party. The electorates are the strongest elements but not strong enough to determine leadership selection in the country. This weakness of the electorates can be attributed to three factors: first, the power play among the incumbent party members, second, the preparation of the opposition parties to take over power, and third, the formation of new political parties and defection by politicians. The case of Kwara State politics interfaced with the personality of Olusola Saraki (father) and Bukola Saraki

(son) who hand-picked electoral candidates based on party loyalty. The father-son relationship has created a huge struggle among the candidates for political positions (Respondents, 2016).

Party disunity is defined by the institutional structure of the country. The party members converge in different political communities to hold caucus meetings and discuss the issues that affect the political party. Aduku and Umoru (2014) explained how political party was formed in the country by the elites after each election to fight one another, deterrence of the masses, maintenance of power, and assassination of party members and opposition party members. Momodu and Ika (2013) supported the argument by stressing that the Nigerian elites invest in power-wealth rather than commit themselves to the rule of law. The politics of factionalisation among the political parties is responsible for the power bloc in the federation of the country. Toyin (2014) observed that the action of Nigerian politicians revolves around power struggles for internal benefit which comes in the form of awards of contracts and political appointments to ministries. An intra-party crisis occurs when some party members do not benefit from the national and state largesse. Kwara politics is built on political networks during the era of Governor Muhammed Lawal with the support of Doctor Olusola Saraki (political godfather). Three years after, the godfather and his godson clashed over a power tussle in the state.

The above scenario indicates that party disunity among the elites translated to the frequent political crises in Nigeria. The power tussle in Kwara State was magnified by a displacement of the incumbent power holder (Muhammed Lawal) in the 2003 election by the political godfather. The admission of new leaders was the responsibility of the godfather who mobilised a large number of political spectators. Therefore, party disunity in Kwara State has always resulted in regime disunity with institutional constraints (Gill, 2000). The acrimony in the 2003 gubernatorial election gave Bukola Saraki (the son of Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki) and his political entourage the victory in the elections of the same year. Lukman (2010) described the aftermath of the 1999 elections in Kwara State as a clash of the titan among political gladiators. However, the pattern of politics was drawn from the old-guard politicians of the defunct Second Republic of 1979. Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki was the majority leader claiming a legitimate authority of Kwara State for the circulation of elites, particularly, in the Ilorin metropolis and other parts of the State.

The emergence of Bukola Saraki in Kwara politics exerted more power which is an instrument of party dictatorship. Gill (2000) noted that a party dictator connotes a single prominent leader and non-regard for opposition parties in the state. Therefore, the individual party member and supporters struggle for leadership succession in the state. The leadership succession cannot only bring personal ambition among the party members rather it can trigger elites' interest in the renewal of certain positions in the state. For example, the election of Abdulfatai Ahmed as Governorship candidate under the All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2015 primary election. A party dictator involves in election rigging through INEC, recruitment of political thugs, recruitment of political hunters from various constituencies, vote buying, and acquisition, or growing of more power for a future position. The political supporters of the personal dictator (executive governor) always protect the interest of the leader whenever there is a problem in the state. In this case, Senator Bukola Saraki was tried by the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) for an allegation of false declaration of assets. During his trial in Abuja, political supporters and experts added to the entourage in the court (*The Guardian*, 2017).

## **Ground Coalition**

The other side of the study is the ground coalition which integrates the incumbent party and opposition party members. In Nigeria's case, a grand coalition is organised through the association of the ruling party and the opposition parties forming a new political party. This study argues that political behaviour translates into a party grand coalition in the country. This process was attributed to the quest for power by the opposition parties to establish a change of government. Chidi (2015) opined that the 2003 presidential election had the ANPP and AD forming an alliance in the 2007 presidential election. Similarly, in the 2011 presidential election, the CPC and ACN formed a grand coalition to defeat PDP but all their effort was in vain. The strategy aligned with that of Kwara politics in the 2003 gubernatorial election. In that period, there was no alliance in Kwara State. Rather, the political godfather decamped to PDP to establish an opposition with his son as the standard flagbearer of the PDP. Abdullahi and Tunde (2013) posited that there was an assurance of victory for any political candidate he supported in the election. Because of this, the 2003 gubernatorial election results that gave Bukola Saraki (godson) under the PDP a victory and Muhammed Lawal (godson) a defeat raised some political issues.

More often than not, the politics of Kwara State was dominated by intra-party crises and the political godfather and godson disagreed on countless issues. In this sense, Kwara politics was embedded in the personal dictatorship. Innocent (2012) observed that the political disagreement between the godfather (Olusola Saraki) and godson (Bukola Saraki) over the successor to the executive seat in the 2011 gubernatorial election created political loggerheads which motivated the state godfather to form an opposition party ACPN to brighten the political chance of the (goddaughter) Rukayat Gbemisola Saraki. As a result of this, the goddaughter lost to Abdulfatai Ahmed who was duly supported by Bukola Saraki (the godson) after completing two tenures as the executive governor of the state. The son also won the senatorial election to the Upper Chamber of the National Assembly.

Ibrahim and Hassan (2014) observed that this circumstance paved the way for the grand coalition among a few political parties: ACN, ANPP, APGA, and CPC. These parties came together to form the All Progressive Congress (APC). The remote causes of the grand coalition are the several failed political attempts to replace PDP, the intra-party crisis in (PDP), the refusal to rotate power through geopolitical formula, and the clamour for a change in the political adventure of the country.

The grand coalition in Kwara State saw PDP members voluntarily decamping to APC and the remaining members (the right wing) remained in PDP. *The Herald* (2013) reported that PDP has fallen apart and it has split into two factions as the former acting National Chairman, Abubakar Kawu Baraje, disclosed at the defection in Abuja. *The Herald* (2014), again, reported the action of Senator Bukola Saraki in mobilising support for APC registration at the Ilorin metropolis. Similarly, Governor Abdulfatai Ahmed revealed publicly that PDP is dead absolutely.

## **Political Campaign**

The process of political campaigns in a democratic society becomes a source of political participation and competition. Democratic culture becomes a popular activity whereby political parties exercise their electoral values in various capacities. The other side of it reflects the electorates as indicating their votes for credible leaders. As a result of making democratisation an enterprise, therefore, politicians depend on the electorates to secure high votes. In normal circumstances, electoral votes always reflect a political party that complies with leadership performance through campaign promises.

Scholars have tried to examine how political campaigns are organised in Nigeria and Kwara State specifically. The political campaigns are organised through the party system and each political party reaches the electorates. In Kwara State, the candidates cannot organise political rallies individually but collectively with the consent of either Dr. Olusola Saraki or Senator Bukola Saraki (the party leader). The father-son relationship helped the party loyalists and any the candidates it endorsed winners in the elections of the State. The campaign in Kwara is facilitated by vote buying and it is the major instrument of mobilisation. (Respondents, 2016).

Furthermore, there are a lot of practices that influenced political campaigns and voting behaviour in Nigeria. The electoral campaign relies on the Constitution of the country as the principal law. Electoral Act 2010 Simplified (2010) stipulated and guided the electoral campaign in a manner that problems will not occur in the activities of each political party. Section 93 (3), Section 95(4) (5), and (6) all protected and regulated the political behaviour of the party members. The rules and regulations of the Electoral Act maintain that:

Political campaigns or slogans must not contain abusive language or use language in a manner disrespectful to religious, ethnic or tribal beliefs ~ Section 95 (1). Further, abusive, slanderous, extreme, vile insinuations or inferences likely to provoke violence must not be used in political campaigns – Section 95 (2).

The time for the campaign should be 90 days and it should stop 24 hours before the election date. The process of the electoral campaign involved advertising through Nigerian media. Ojekwe (2015) acknowledged that political campaign influences the voters in making relevant choices for leadership selection. Several political strategies are combined to capture the political attention of the electorates, such as personality, appearance, and language used in gaining recognition. The process of the campaign in Kwara State is influenced by different political activities, such as political parties displaying billboards, party stickers, and jingles on the radio and television organised before the elections (Respondents, 2016).

The constituent unit of Kwara State also adopted political slogans which added to the political awareness of each political party. The administration of Muhammed Lawal, as the founding democratic government in 1999, paved the way for the slogan of

'No shaking' and a second term for his re-election in 2003. The political slogan was attributed to the incumbent power under ANPP particularly, the gubernatorial seat. The opposition political parties seeking power across the federation were PDP and AD. The PDP, as the major opposition political party at the state level, adopted the slogan of '*Oloye*' (The Chief) under the leadership of Bukola Saraki who won the election in 2003. The political slogan and hailing mean that the political godfather can maintain its power under the PDP. The election of 2011 changed the slogan to 'legacy continues' for PDP. The ACN as the opposition party thrilled the electorates with 'democracy for justice'. However, in the roadmap to the 2015 general elections after the grand coalition, APC, as the power seeker, adopted the slogan 'change *dole*'. This political slogan was used to mobilise the people with a bunch of brooms indicating that poor government must be swept out by the electorates. This was justified by Olujide et al (2011) who observed that the major opposition political party, ACN, and the incumbent political party in Kwara State, PDP, established political slogans in order to cause assault among supporters during campaigns. In Kwara, thugs were used by the party members in Ilorin metropolis to foment violence. During the campaign, the billboards were destroyed at Adeta Roundabouts opposite Government High School (GHS) at Ilorin.

The process of the electoral campaigns in Nigeria is organised in varying degrees between the opposition parties and the incumbent party. Udeze *and* Akpan (2013) and Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) asserted that each political party established four means of reaching the electorates. These are political rallies, speeches, personal contact, and lobbying. Others include banners, T-shirts and caps, and leaflets. All these elements are used to educate the electorates as well as to serve as marketing strategies for winning the elections. In this sense, social media also plays an indispensable role in communicating with the electorates. PLAC (2013) unveiled that the inclusion of Facebook and Twitter increased the level of awareness in the country. This development promotes Kwara State politics as witnessed by this researcher in the 2015 elections, particularly the gubernatorial election. The PDP and APC both sent SMSs messages through various telecommunication networks, e.g. MTN, Glo, and Etisalat. These social media platforms gave adequate information to the electorates before and after the election.

*The Punch* (2015) reported several political activities across the country. The two political parties, PDP and APC, in the 2015 elections, presented party candidates with no clear valuable manifestoes. Nevertheless, this was attributed to the failure to

educate voters adequately about what the candidates hope to accomplish in office, how, and when. The candidates vying for political offices, both the incumbent party and opposition parties, are to design programmes that would run through the tenure. Each party member does not have a copy of the manifestoes as promised during the campaigns. Furthermore, the campaigns have been operating in the worst forms of psych-verbal and advertorial thugs. In the same sense, political campaigns result in electoral violence across the country between 2014 and 2015, and some party supporters were reportedly killed during the campaign rallies (*The Punch*, 2015).

The electoral competition in Nigeria often develops by hiring people for political campaigns. *The Punch* (2015) exposed the behaviour of the politicians across the federation. The report had it that politicians hired young and old people to boost the population at campaign fields. The channel for mobilising the people ranges in degrees and political agents are divided into groups. The pre-election activity often becomes a business period because the participants that were mobilised through the agents received honoraria in the form of money, N200, N500, N1000, and N2000, depending on the roles of each participant in the campaign. Kwara State was reported to rent commercial buses for political campaigns (*The Punch*, 2015).

### **Patron-Client Networks**

The inclusion of this section in this study seeks to address the relevant characters of the governing elites in Kwara State. However, the impacts of patrons and clients are associated with the political networks of the oligarchs (few) that dominate the political environment. I conceive patrons as political leaders who provide essential resources to clients when needed while clients provide loyalty and support to the patrons for leadership (Ovis, 2001). The characteristics of the patron-client network as a democratic experiment in African political systems and the system was developed from neo-patrimony (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997).

First, the right to rule in neo-patrimonial government is ascribed to a person (political dynasty) rather than an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. Second, the leadership of the state is attached to big men and supreme leaders that dominate the state political apparatus and stand above the laws. Third, the relationship of the political loyalists permeated the formal political system, and officials occupying bureaucratic positions. Fourth, the personal dictator always maintains

political order in the state. And lastly, the political supporters receive an official salary, they also have access to various forms of illicit rents, stipends and privileges attached to the operation (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997).

The process of patron-client networks started after the elections of 1999 in the country. The office of the Executive Governor and the Freedom House is operated under the system of patron-client networks. Thus, every election in Kwara State was controlled by the political godfather (Dr. Olusola Saraki) and his biological son, Senator Bukola Saraki who mobilised the electorates for the incumbent party. The successive governments benefitted from the networks vis Muhammed Lawal (1999-2003), Bukola Saraki (2003-2011), and Abdulfatai Ahmed (2011-2015). All these successive governors were handpicked by neopatrimonialism practices. Therefore, the state resources were distributed with no accountability or transparency, and employment was given to every political supporter of each government (Respondents, 2016).

The patron-client and neopatrimonialism are socio-economic and political networks that associate, mobilise, and assist all party members in the state. Meanwhile, employment in the state ministries, local government, and secondary and primary schools compromised neo-patrimonial networks. Thus, some political supporters who belonged to the lower status with secondary school certificates, Diploma certificates, and National certificates of Education and equivalents are placed in secondary and primary schools (Respondents, 2016). Neo-patrimonial leaders strategically employed the political hunters in all the twenty-four constituencies of the state to give feedback with respect to politics. The political hunters received salaries through their recipient accounts, including the political thugs who snatched the electoral boxes during the elections (Respondents, 2016).

The question raised in this study is: who are the neopatrimonial leaders of Kwara State? It is good to start this discussion with the political myth of the government of Muhammed Lawal which came into office in 1999. The political authority was structured along egocentric government, but the political authority was challenged by the godfather (Olusola Saraki). Secondly, the electoral success of Bukola Saraki in 2003-2011 has also paved the way for political change in the state. His government distributed state resources based on personality and loyalty to the political supporters. His government also sent political supporters for pilgrimage to Mecca, buying rams for Muslim politicians, and Christians to Jerusalem in order to be re-elected for the

subsequent constituent seats and to repel any political challenge spiritually. Lastly, the government of Governor Abulfatai Ahmed is characterised by the principles of his predecessor, Senator Bukola Saraki (Respondent, 2016). Therefore, the system is defined as an association of the mafia or a few elite classes working against the practice of democracy in Kwara State.

## **Analysis of Data**

The reports were collected from formal and informal respondents from different constituencies of the state. The politics of Kwara State was segmented into different forms and the people participated in it through classes and status vis-à-vis the elite, political leaders, political godfathers, political agents, political wards, and the electorates as well. The electorates are subdivided into theatre artistes of politics, such as party members, party representatives, party loyalists, market women, and youth representatives. However, the electoral campaigns became an instrument of party representation. In this process, different political structures are recognised as the channel of reaching the electorates (voters) and each constituency is broken down into political wards. The wards basically represent party members of certain units under the local governments and the party members meet with party interest as old and new members participate in the electoral activities. In this sense, the political godfather (Dr. Olusola Saraki late) was recognised as the grassroot mobiliser in Kwaran politics and it makes the participation and competition high (Respondents, 2016).

In the past, few people participated in the politics of Kwara State as they believed that only politicians involve in politics. However, the large awareness of Kwaran politics started through enlightenment which encouraged the people to increase in number, and some factors, such as economic, jobs, upgrade of traditional rulers, power, influence, infrastructures and projects of the community, etc. The mobilisation towards elections arose through the consultation of electorates at vicinities to sell the idea of a political party from the manifestoes. In another practice, the political godfather has a high impact on Kwaran politics, and Ilorin political environment is a peculiar case. As Olusola Saraki (godfather) hand-picked electoral candidates for elections as well as finance them for logistics and campaigns in the governorship, councilors, National Assembly, and Kwara Freedom House (Respondents, 2016).

The politics in Kwara State engaged the people to participate in it actively. The level of participation is considered as service to humanity. Indeed, the politics of Kwara State is of two interests: first, some people participate in politics purposely for serving the people solemnly; and second, other people participate in politics in order to serve their selfish interests in the government. In this behaviour, the electorates are informed and mobilised by the political parties to vote in the elections. Therefore, it is the party that canvasses the candidates and the candidates also support the party by going out to solicit the votes of the electorates before elections. As a result of this process, people come out to exercise their civic duty on election days (Respondents, 2016).

The politics of Kwara was also reported from the historical perspective as the First Republic paraded credible leaders in Nigeria with enthusiastic principles. These leaders are classified into two groups. The first group was occupied by elites with electoral values who wanted to serve the masses under the Action Group (AG) especially the poor in the society. An example is Alhaji Sulaiman Maito from Kwara. Second, the bourgeoisie class collectively formed the Northern People's Congress (NPC) with the same principles in Nigeria, from 1960 to 1965. In these periods, there was religious inducement in politics but the leaders have people in mind irrespective of the religious affiliations. However, the current politics which started in 1999 was preoccupied with vote buying and Kwara State is not exempted. In this dispensation, the people that are qualified to translate electoral promises into viable reality do not have the electoral privilege unless they buy the votes of the electorates (Respondent, 2016).

The problems bedeviling Kwaran politics were threefold: (a) money, (b) assistance of people, and (c) personality. The first set of people is recognised as selfish interest politicians who want to achieve and take something home without investment in the State. This set of people causes a problem when their interest does not materialise in the long run and end up in crisis. However, giving information to the people on elections from 1999-2015 was attributed to Dr. Olusola Saraki as the grassroots mobiliser from the ward levels to the federal levels. The political godfather prepared logistics for elections so that any candidate presented will always win elections and dance to his tunes afterwards. Kwaran politics focuses on a political godfather and presently it is championed by Senator Bukola Saraki (son) after the death of his father (Olusola Saraki) (Respondents, 2016).

**Research Question-:** What elements determine the electoral participation and competition in Kwara State?

**Figure 1:** Elements that determine electoral participation and competition

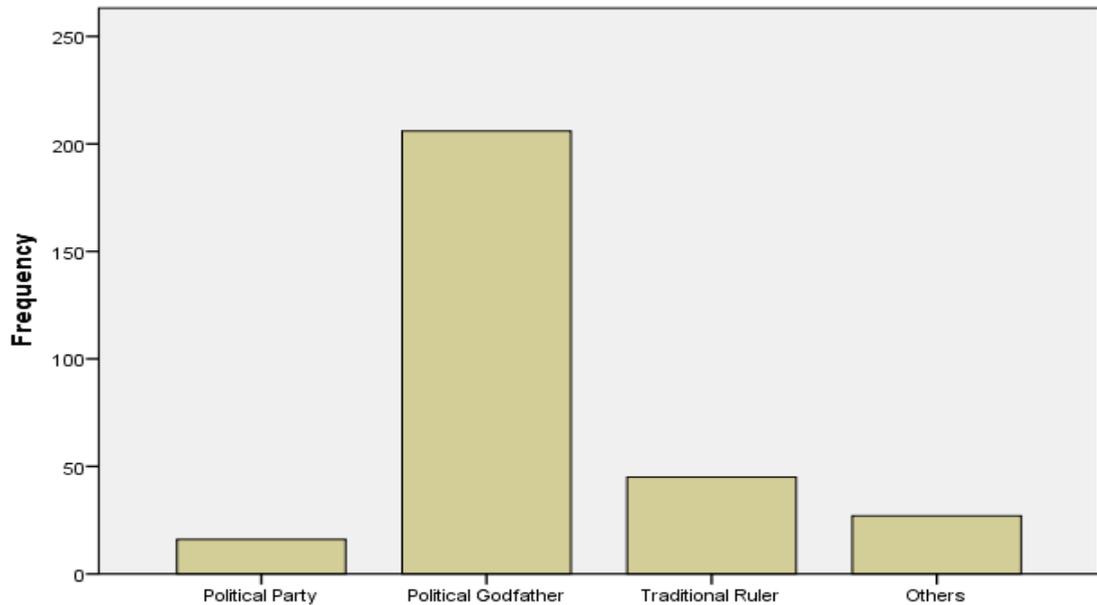


Figure 1 shows the elements that determine electoral participation and competition in the state. The data gathered from the respondents indicated that the political godfather was the major element that determined electoral participation and contestation in the state. This stance reflected that the electoral system informed the principles of democracy on leadership selection. The bar graph above indicates that political godfathers with the highest frequency of 206 and 70.1 percent. This element was a challenge to representative democracy in Kwara State. The finding from the interview confirmed that the political godfather had been instrumental to political participation and competition. In this regard, elections were manipulated by the political godfather in order to maintain the incumbent government in the state. To this end, the outcome in Kwara State thus illuminates the practice in the federation of Nigeria and was aptly discussed:

The godfather is not a business philanthropy...The godfather gives support to install the godson oftentimes by devious anti-democratic means...They are political merchants of fear. They dispense violence freely and fully on those who stand in their way. In this, they play the additional role of warlords. They establish, train and maintain a standing personal army which they ostensibly supplement with a sprinkling of the official police detachment. In order to effect electoral change, they bribe election officials to deliver the winning election figures. They also bribe the police and other security agents to look the other way when they traffic ballot boxes and sack opponents' strongholds (Ogundiya, 2009).

Hon. Mumini Katibi a member of the Legislative House, during the interview schedule, answered that politicians who came under Dr. Olusola Saraki and Bukola Saraki always won elections. If, however, there were problems after the elections father-son mended a solution to the electoral problem and this process was based on the continuity of the incumbent government. This challenge invariably obstructed the deepening of democracy as a result of hegemonic character which weaken democratisation of culture on leadership selection in Kwara State. This character also translated to a political lord that was so much interested in political power against the public interest in the state.

## **Conclusion**

The party system in Kwara State was monolithic in operation as it involved a party dominating the political landscape of the State between 2003 and 2015. As a result of this, the action and character of the political elites in the state were organised to distribute functional and effective dividends to the electorates based on the comments of the respondents. Another issue that added to the electoral challenge in Kwara State is party disunity. This often leads to a crisis within the incumbent party and manifested in the division of the party members into two factions with each faction consolidating power by forming a grand coalition with the opposition parties. In essence, within the political dispensation under investigation, Kwara State lacked independent opposition parties with reference to the alternation of power. The reason for the point raised is that power remains an issue that each political party struggle for in the State. Therefore, the opposition parties are also created by the political godfather. Meaning that if there is any internal crisis within the political party, there is the advantage of moving to any party

that is registered with INEC. The opposition members join any available party to contest elections in the State.

Obviously, politics in Kwara State is based on political ranking with politicians primarily participating and competing in their electoral wards. Indeed, each ward in the constituency plays an essential role in the nomination of the electoral candidates for positions in the State. In Kwara State politics, ranks are distributed based on the personality and contribution of the politicians during the elections. The fact is that the politician that wins elections at the ward level is given leverage in the affairs of the state. Therefore, ranks are instrumental to the political ladder in the sense that each politician can rise from a lower rank to a higher rank in the State when he or she delivers at the electoral polls. The highest rank in Kwara State is 'party leader'. The leader of the party is instrumental in the distribution of positions to all levels of government in Nigeria. Indeed, Senate President Bukola Saraki is the leader of the incumbent party in Kwara State. He rose from political godson to the rank of party leader after the demise of his father, Dr. Olusola Saraki (godfather) in 2013.

Apart from these, the executive and the legislative arm of government are not adequately supporting the interest of the people due to the power and oligarchy in the State. The practice of oligarchy was a collective effort of a few elites, particularly elites that are loyal to the political patron (leader) and are given leverage for any position in Kwara State. Therefore, the practice of democracy was responsible for the one-party domination operating under a multi-party system. However, there was a constitution that guides the corporate existence of the citizens in any matters. Meanwhile, the electoral Acts derived their powers from the Constitution of Nigeria and this also operates in Kwara State. Ordinarily, the Electoral Acts were not properly implemented by the popular party and the opposition parties and that was the reason the political system was not properly consolidated since the transition to democracy.

Overall, campaign promises, leadership performance, and the deepening of democracy focus on socio-economic development. The citizens are the human resources that organise a responsible government that supports the interests of the populace within the state. The principles and mechanisms of democracy pave the way for good governance and it comes in the form of infrastructures or the welfare of the people. The government should be able to formulate public policies which have a direct impact on the people. For example, there should be a provision of qualitative education for the

people, health, roads, employment, and an adequate supply of potable water for the people. All these socio-economic infrastructures have not been adequately supplied since the transition to democracy due to undemocratic behaviour and the private interests of each successive government in Kwara State.

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