Party Institutions and Candidates' Selection in Nigeria: An Exploratory Study of Kebbi State

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies examined roles of political parties in democratic process with little attention on candidates' selection, particularly in emerging democracies. This paper therefore explores the role of party institutions in the selection of candidates in Nigeria. In-depth Interviews (IDIs) provided the major source of data for the study. The major respondents included party members, citizens, Nongovernmental organizations as well as officials of the electoral institution and security agencies such as Police, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Prisons etc. The findings indicate that party institutions select candidates subjectively in which strong candidates are often manipulated out of the process leading to mass party defections across parties and underperformance of many political parties in elections and in government. The paper suggests strategies for the strengthening and institutionalization of parties in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

In weakly institutionalized party systems, parties that are relevant in one year often are irrelevant a few years later. The percentages of the votes and seats that parties win in these weakly institutionalized systems tend to vary considerably from one election to the next. The stability of interparty competition depends on vote volatility (the level of vote or percentage of the valid vote a party has during election). The Nigerian case presents a wide range of volatility, especially from North to South and in these regions, parties have weak roots in society. Voters tend to cast their ballots for different parties, elections after elections. This suggests that parties possess weak level of linkage with society. Voters commonly lack loyalty to parties, and instead cast their votes based more on the traits and characteristics of the individual candidates or their electoral campaign messages.

This is so, because parties have relatively weak and ephemeral ties with society. In institutionalized party systems, parties possess a noteworthy level of material and human resources, intraparty processes are predictable and routinized, and the party as an institution prevails over individual party leaders (Mainwaring, 1998). In weakly institutionalized party systems, however, parties have limited resources, internal processes are unpredictable, and individual leaders dominate such parties. Similarly, the limited degree of nationalization of political parties and party systems has also several significant effects on the functioning of a democracy (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003). Schattschneider (1960) linked the nationalization of the party system to voters' orientations. He argued that in highly nationalized party systems, national factors may be more important in forging bonds between voters and parties. Conversely, in less nationalized party systems, subnational factors may be more salient in creating such bonds. Accordingly, little empirical studies exist on party institutions and candidates' selection using a subnational unit in Nigeria. This study therefore focuses on the role of party institutions in selection of candidates Kebbi state, Nigeria.

1.1. Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions

a. What are the roles of party institutions in Nigeria's democracy?

b. How do party institutions select their candidates in Nigeria?

c. What are the challenges of candidates' selection by parties in Nigeria?

d. How could the conduct of parties be improved in candidates' selection?

1.2. Research Objectives

The study will address the following research objectives

a. To examine the roles of party institutions in Nigeria's democracy

b. To explore the process of candidates' selection by parties in Nigeria

c. To analyse the challenges of candidates' selection by political parties in Nigeria

d. To suggests strategies for improving the conduct of parties in candidates' selection

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A crucial characteristic of party systems is their level of institutionalization. While too much institutionalization can potentially have a deleterious effect on the functioning of a democracy—with the pre-2005 Nigerian party system a classic example (Crisp, 2000)—party institutionalization generally is seen as a positive trait for a democracy (Mainwaring, 1998, 1999; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995).

The more institutionalized a party system is, the greater the likelihood that it will have programmatic parties: that is, parties that compete electorally and primarily based on their established policy reputations regarding key policy issues and concrete policy proposals. In a party system dominated by programmatic parties, interparty competition is based primarily on competing policy programs. Furthermore, the parties' policy orientations tend to be relatively stable, allowing for higher levels of democratic (voter) accountability and voter identification than in weakly institutionalized party systems (Shugart and Mainwaring, 1997; Mainwaring, 1998). Institutionalized party systems also help ensure greater policy consistency because of the

strong role played by parties in political recruitment and the concerted efforts made by elites to promote and protect the value of the party label (which implies maintaining relatively consistent policy positions over time, with dramatic changes in policy stances made only infrequently).In weakly institutionalized party systems, interparty competition is based primarily on personal appeals or short-term populist policy proposals designed to win over voters and then be forgotten once the election takes place (Mainwaring, 1998). Parties also play a much less prominent role in the political recruitment process. In weakly institutionalized party systems, political parties often are short-lived, and their policy positions on specific issues tend to be highly malleable. It is much more difficult for voters in weakly institutionalized party systems to hold political parties accountable than in institutionalized party systems. It is also much less easy to identify how one's vote will translate into a governance option, and what that governance option will be once the party is in power (Shugart & Mainwaring, 1997). Furthermore, since parties play a weak role in the recruiting process, are often short-lived, and place less importance on the policy brand name and value of their party label, policy consistency is thus much lower in weakly institutionalized party systems than in their institutionalized counterparts. Lastly, given the comparative lack of commitment of political elites to their parties in particular and to the party system in general, weakly institutionalized party systems are more conducive breeding grounds for anti-system politics (that is, the establishment and rise of political groups—especially political parties—whose goal is the overthrow or radical transformation of the existing democratic regime). Four key components together influence the level of party system institutionalization in a country: stability in patterns of interparty competition; party roots in society; the legitimacy of parties and elections; and party organization.

2.1. Research Methodology

The study adopted qualitative approach. IDIs was the major instrument employed in data collection. The credibility and validity of IDIs as instrument of data collection in qualitative research is widely acknowledged in the literature. The major respondents in this study included some party officials and members, citizens, Nongovernmental organizations as well as INEC officials and security agencies such as Police, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence, Nigerian Prisons etc. Atlas ti7 software was used in the analysis of data.
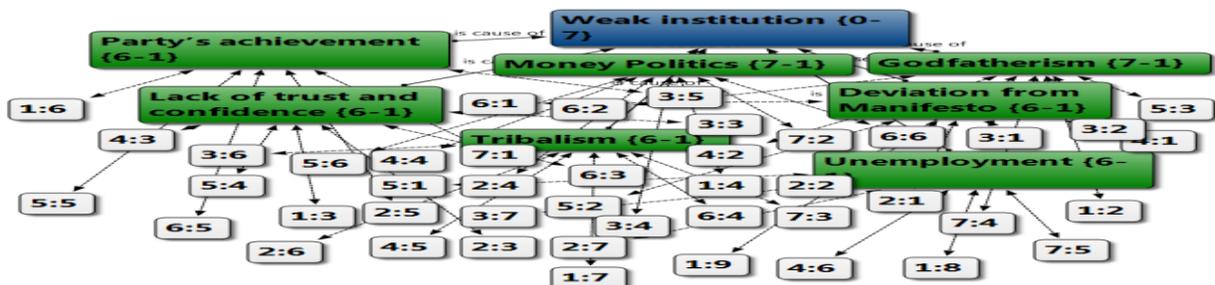
2.2. Data Analysis

Figure-1.1. Showing network matrices of node and child nodes
Source: Authors computation (2016)

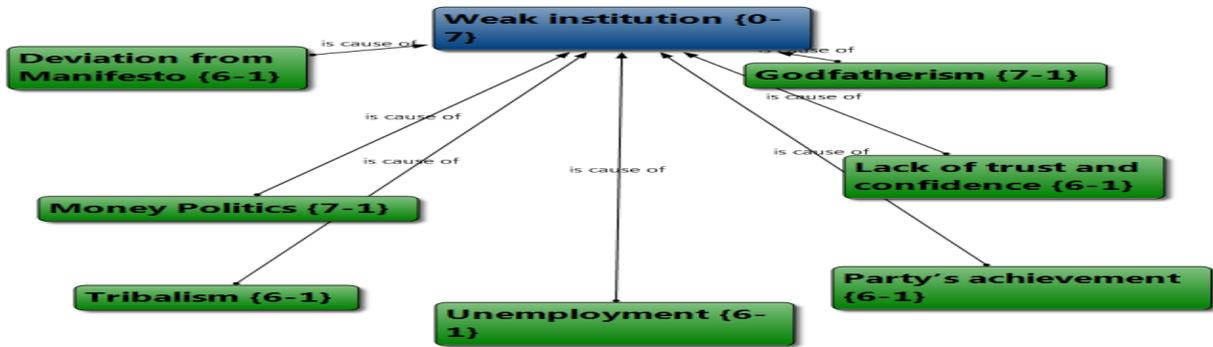Based on the interviews conducted the following sub-themes were formed:-

Figure-1.2. Showing node and child nodes

Deviation from Manifesto

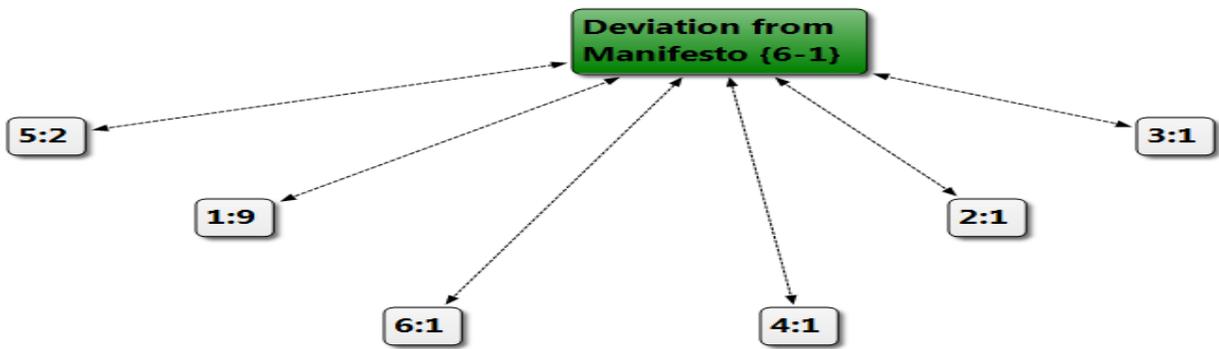**Figure-1.3.** Showing child node and network

The diagram above suggests that Political parties in Nigeria often deviate from their manifesto. Once a political party wins election, it hardly abides by its Manifesto. Manifesto play an important role in party's growth and development because it provide directions to political party. If the institution is weak, many of it manifesto can never be realized. However, because politicians are anxious to win and control the machinery of government, they often resorts to other available means to influence and/or compel the electorate to vote for them as one of the respondent puts it:

> The issue of deviation from the manifestos and constitution of parties constitute the biggest challenge of political parties in Nigeria and is a cause of selecting the wrong candidates, emphasis should rather be on the suitability of candidates than base on ascription and other primordial factors known to them (4).

A newspaper report observed that It said the manifesto was a product of an empirical and painstaking process embarked upon by the party, in a deviation from the old practice of packaging a party's manifesto on a whim. With conditions deteriorating throughout Nigeria, with security an ever increasing concern, with the lack of jobs pushing families and young people further and further into poverty and with new stories of corruption within the government appearing day after day, the party decided to commission the largest ever public opinion survey in Nigerian history to determine the current status of things in the nation directly from those who knew best – the actual people of Nigeria.What issue would you like the President and National Assembly to

focus on most', an overwhelming majority (60 percent) said jobs was the dominant issue that the government should address. The voice of the people was clear. The nation is going in the wrong direction. The nation wants change and would not vote to re-elect politicians in part because the number one issue to Nigerians is jobs and the nation believes government has no credibility on the issue of job creation. According to the party, the unveiling of the party's manifesto, designed with the survey results in mind and the real needs of the Nigerian people made evident by the people themselves, will be the clearest indication yet that the movement for change has indeed begun (The will,2014).
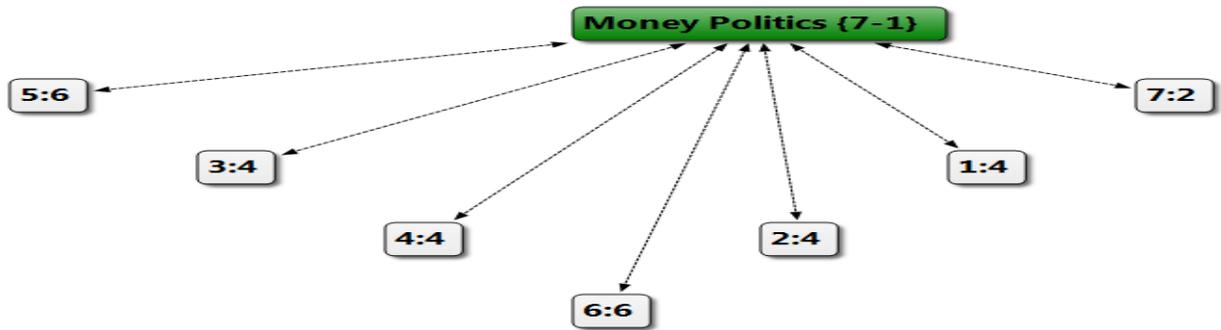
2.3. Money Politics

Figure-1.4. Showing child node and network

Source: Authors computation (2016)

Money plays a vital role in the politics of modern Nigeria. Without money the possibility of winning election is very dicey. In the previous democratic experiences in Nigeria, particularly during the first republic, money politics played only a small part in politics. Since second republic, however the influence of money in Nigeria's electoral politics has become deeply entrenched. Thus in addition to other factors, the use of money to influence the voting behavior of majority of voters has become one of the strategies of winning elections, due largely to poverty and unemployment as one of the respondent put it:-

> I started contesting for election since 1980s, as at that period, there was relative sanity in Nigerian politics. It was the politics of principles i.e who can deliver for the party or who can be used for effective mobilization of support for the party, particularly among the youth. It is not the question of what you have that determine your selection by parties or even your electoral success at the polls. That was when and how I came into politics. For instance, during the aborted third republic under the two-party system of the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), I was shopped by the executive of the NRC to be the flag bearer of the party after it was realized that the five people going into primary elections are not credible and popular enough to win elections for the party. That was how I emerged as the candidate of the party at the time. However, the conduct of parties in the fourth republic contradicts the principles of merit, credibility and popularity. Candidates' selection by parties is greatly influenced by the amount of money induced. Party officials and delegates are bribed by candidates with the view to emerge victorious. Youth gangs are usually sponsored by candidates to fiercely and violently

advertise candidates in the buildup to elections. This is the situation in Kebbi state from 1999 to date. Party institutions appeared to be available for the highest bidders, as candidates are being encouraged to bribe officials to secure nominations.

This trend appears to be a general one, as various respondents corroborated this viewpoint. It is thus normal to see candidates seeking for nominations of parties to be involved in high level monetary negotiations directly or indirectly with party officials and their agents with the view to seeking their endorsement. This is also against the background that most parties in Kebbi state conduct primary elections as a mechanism for the determination of parties' flag bearers at various levels. The control and influence exercised by party officials on delegates, who cast ballots in party primaries make them essentially central in the manipulation of electoral outcomes at party level. More so that party officials can also discard electoral outcomes and announce candidates of their choice even without cogent reasons. This therefore heightens resource-based (monetary politics) party politics in the state, which affects the quality of candidates' selection process and outcomes. Different categories of respondents, which include party officials, party youths, candidates, delegates, security agents, members of NGOs and CSOs all supported this narrative and provided lifetime experiences of how party institutions encouraged the use of money in the process of candidates' selection in the politics of the state. A newspaper report observed that during the 2015 election campaigns, immediate past President Goodluck Jonathan faced allegation of spending N2 trillion re-electioneering campaigns, which he denied. The allegation came up in the midst of public interest generated by a huge N23 billion said to be raised at a single banquette in Abuja organized by his party – Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for his re-election bid. *Security votes have been made* un-accounted *for; sludge money, for government officials to use, as they want or pocket.* The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Crimes Commission (ICPC) backed by other security agencies have been up and doing with indictments, questioning, arrests and commencement of prosecution of some leading politicians and executives of the immediate past administration(Guardian,2016).
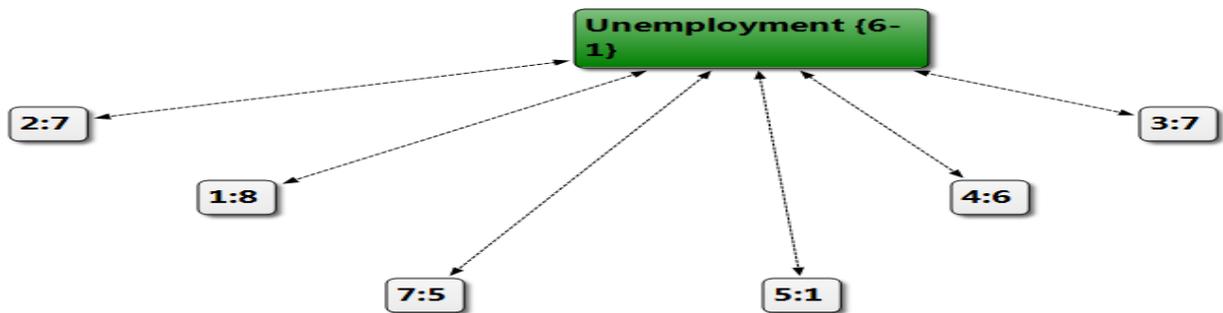
2.4. Unemployment

Figure-1.5. Showing child node and network

Source: Authors computation (2016)

The problem of unemployment among the youths has also contributed to the problem of candidates' selection by party institutions. The endemic scourge of unemployment among the youth in Nigeria and

particularly in Kebbi state has impacted negatively on democratization. The army of unemployed youths become useful tools to candidates and party officials in a bid to actualize their self-centered political goals. The youth are often used in violent mobilization for candidates and parties as sheer show of political strength against rivals within or outside party institutions. The youths are used as veritable tool for intimidation, harassment and violent crackdown on rival candidates and parties. They are often hired and sponsored cheaply by candidates and parties to advance the candidature of individuals and promote parties by coercion often violently with the support of their sponsors. One of the respondents argues:-

> We don't use youth for violence we only used them in order to attract crowd as a strategy of intimidating opponents. We also compensate the youth by providing them with jobs. I was the one in charge youth mobilization in kebbi state between 1999 and 2007. In addition to using youths in our mobilization strategy, we also provide concrete benefits to communities and challenged our opponents to also show their contribution to the development of communities we are competing for their support. To achieve this, the youths were used to smear the campaign against opponents, which spread widely across the society. This was the strategy we employed in a local election in Zodi in Zuru Local Government. Since then the role of youths in political mobilization become widespread and deeply entrenched in the democratic process in Kebbi state. Thus no candidate or party could boost of support without the youths. This was later abused and the youths were often manipulated cheaply by candidates and parties for the realization of certain political goals. As a result, many ignorant and unemployed youth were taken for granted by candidates and parties. It then become obvious that one of the symbol of strength by candidates and parties is the number of youths are able to mobilize. This greatly affects candidates selection by party institutions in the state, as party officials in addition to gratification they receive from candidates are also intimidated by violent youths, which belongs to different candidates.

Accordingly, youths are used for many purposes by politicians which include such acts as vandalism, thuggery, abuse and intimidation of opponents and most times as a guards for candidates and political parties. The abuse of the youths by politicians though truncates orderly democratic process it sometimes advance the interests of candidates and parties. The youths are known to be agents of electoral fraud, manipulation and violence with the view to influencing outcomes in favour of candidates and parties. The vulnerable condition of the youths in Nigeria, particularly in Kebbi state which is associated with poverty, ignorance, unemployment and underemployment is largely responsible for their manipulation by politicians. Thus even unpopular candidates are made popular with large number of youths rallying around them chanting slogans, intimidating opponents and coercing the people. Even though these youths are not seen to be constructive in their mobilization strategies and don't seems to add any significant value to candidates and party advertisements, but they do influence public opinion in relation to candidates and parties they represent. Accordingly, another respondent added that:-

> Since politics and particularly democracy is a game of number, the crowd pulled by the youths becomes an advantage to candidates and parties. Party institutions are sometimes greatly influenced by the number of youths supporting candidates, which determines selection process.

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This is even against the backdrop that many of the youths involved in this kind of political activities are not eligible voters and could not promote their candidates or parties by their votes.

It could be argued that youth unemployment largely promote their engagement into violent political activities, particularly electoral violence. The huge incentives they receives as payoff by candidates and parties remain one of the major factors that engender violent democratic culture in Nigeria, particularly in Kebbi state. The youths that thrive in violent mobilization for candidates and parties are elevated to high status. Some of them are favored for valuable gifts such as landed properties, cars, huge amount of money, government contracts and in some few instances formal appointments into government positions if the party they supported wins election. For this reason, other occupations and trades become unattractive to the youths that are greatly linked to politicians. Youth leaders are thus recognized as major stakeholders in the politics of Kebbi state. They are reckoned with in governmental decisions and their status highly appreciated by members of the society largely on account of their influence in government. After elections they play rather different roles. They are known to influencing appointment of persons into strategic positions or help political office holders retain their position depending on the extent they patronize them. They are also known to be in the habit of blackmailing politicians holding political appointment, which may influence their removal. Given these chain of activities, before, during and even after elections, youths engagement in political mobilization and particularly candidates' selection is linked not only to their poverty condition but also the huge incentives associated with youth violence in politics in the state.
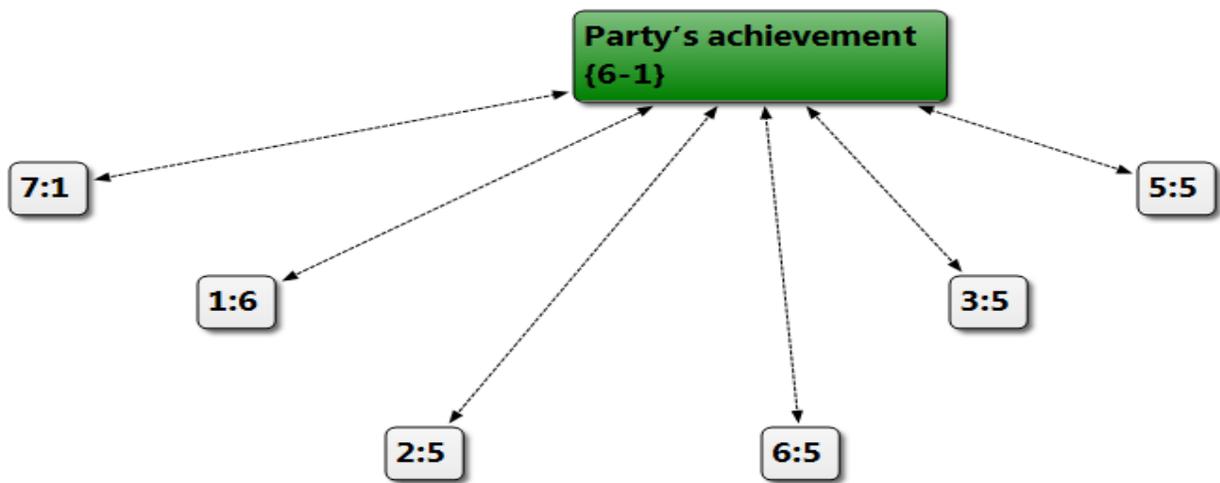
2.5. Party's Achievement

Figure-1.6. Showing child node and network

Source: Authors computation (2016)

Parties' achievements also play a role in the process of candidates' selection. Even though little attention is given to the performance of parties and candidates in electioneering campaigns, these achievements often becomes the basis for mobilization by parties and candidates seeking for election or nomination by their parties. It is thus very common to see candidates and parties making reference to certain achievements as

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their major credentials and the basis upon which the electorate or their parties should entrust with political leadership. This viewpoint featured repeatedly among the respondents as a recurring factor that ought to influence candidates' selection by parties in the state. It was however argued that while this is recognized as an important factor in the determination of quality candidates, parties' or candidates' achievements hardly count in the final choice of candidates by parties. Some respondents argue though that achievements do count in candidates' selection. For instance a respondent added that:-

> Candidates' selection is one of the most difficult decisions by parties. Competition by candidates is usually very stiff, largely because lucrative nature of political offices in Nigeria. Thus parties and delegates mostly interrogate the credentials of contestants and the basis of such interrogation has always been the achievements of candidates in the past. Even though the weight of money politics has downplayed the issue of achievements, supporters of various candidates will always want to make reference to their achievements even if such achievements are false or façade. This in a way encourages the politicians to deliver certain public goods to the people as part of their credentials in politics.
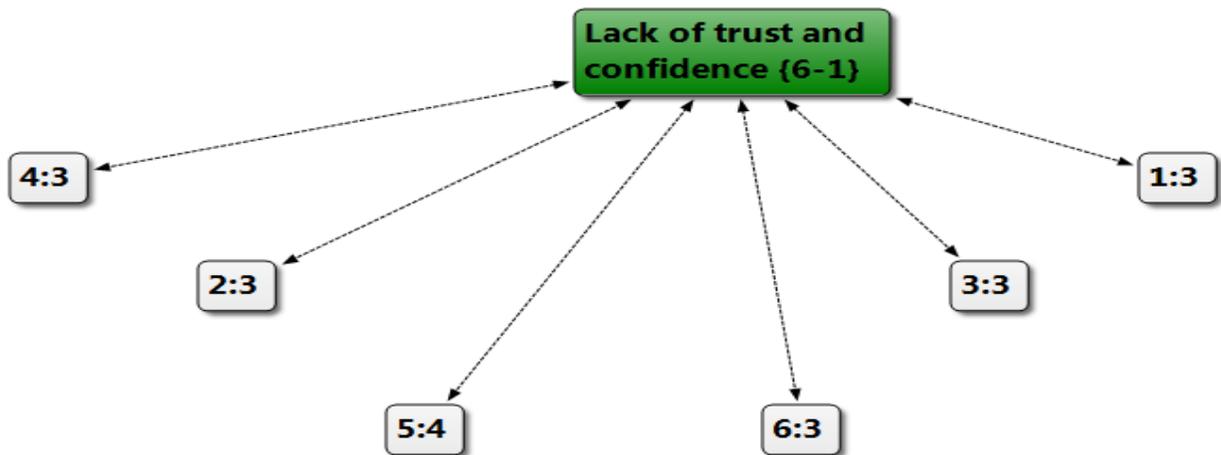
2.6. Lack of Trust and Confidence

Figure-1.7. Showing child node and network

Source: Authors computation (2016)

Politicians mobilize people by establishing trust and confidence with the people. Once people are convinced that a candidate is trustworthy then they tend to favor him during elections either at party level or in general elections. However, because of the abysmal performance of politicians in the fourth republic, which is associated with the scourge of public corruption, people's trust and confidence in politicians have dramatically decreased. Thus regardless of the credentials of politicians, the people are largely of the believe that politicians seeking for nominations and election into public offices are mainly interested in enriching themselves fraudulently. This conviction by electorate and party officials often encourages money politics, which also affects candidates' selection by party institutions. Oftentimes party officials and delegates within parties openly seek for incentives from candidates in return for their votes. The candidates are also aware that

the only way to be successful in primary elections is to bribe party officials and delegates even higher than what their opponents can offer. A respondent argues that:

> Party officials, delegates and party members have gradually lost confidence in politicians. The massive corruption in government and poor performance of politicians is responsible for the erosion of trust and confidence in them. Party officials and delegates would prefer to collect inducement from politicians in exchange for their votes than to count on their credibility, which they don't have. Only a few candidates earn the trust and confidence of party officials and electorate

Another respondent added that:-

> While many politicians are not trustworthy, a few of them can be trusted. A clear picture of this type of candidate is Muhammadu Buhari. Most of the people that voted for him did so because of his trustworthiness, they so much believe that he can deliver, people from different political parties voted for him.
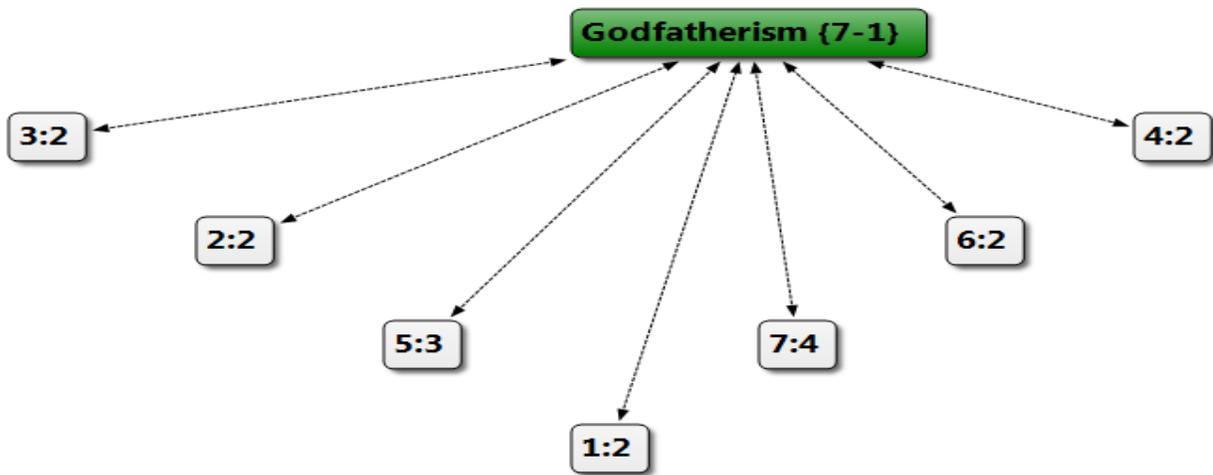
2.7. Godfatherism

Figure-1.8. Showing child node and network

Source: Authors computation (2016)

The excesses of big men otherwise known as godfathers have been a major phenomenon in Nigerian politics. They are usually referred to as political entrepreneurs who invest resources in politics by sponsoring candidates and financing parties for concrete material benefits. The preponderance of godfathers in the politics of Nigeria has over the years weakened party institutions in the country. Oftentimes they determine party leadership by appointing or influencing the election or selection of their favorites with clear intention of controlling wholly party affairs. In most cases they unilaterally select candidates through various undemocratic mechanisms that are beyond the reach of ordinary party members. Thus candidates aspiring for party nominations often compete for the attention of godfathers within their parties. If there are more than one godfathers at various levels the competition between and among the godfathers and their stooges is heightens, which overheats the polity and degenerates to violent mobilization. Where godfathers exist, candidates' selection is hardly free from fraud and manipulation of various kinds. The godfathers are only

interested in the payoffs from their stooges if they win election. This payoffs are usually in form of contracts, appointments of the their favorites in government, cash allocation and other favors that strengthen their political platforms.

In addition to the above, a respondent observed that:-

> Selfish interest is the major issue that gives birth to godfatherism. Most times strong candidates are not selected by parties largely because they are not the favorites of the godfathers. This trend often results to intraparty crisis leading to defections and court cases within the same party. The overbearing influence of godfathers in party politics reduces candidates to mere stooges who must be seen to be serving the interests of their godfathers. The factor of godfather is a major force that undermines the institutionalization of parties in Nigeria.
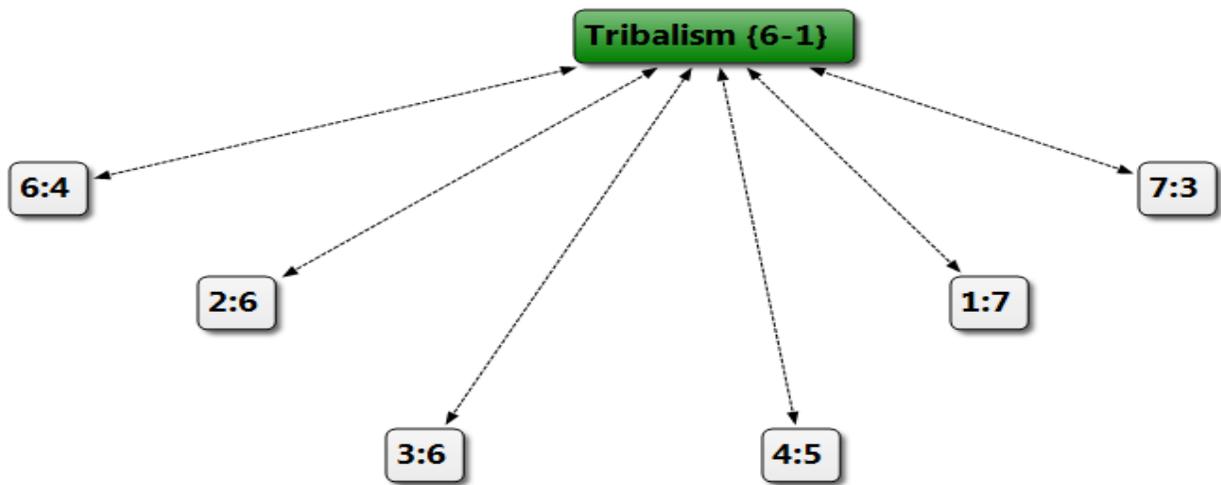
2.8. Tribalism

Figure-1.9. Showing child node and network

Source: Authors computation (2016)

Tribalism had played and continues to play a crucial role in Nigeria's politics. Tribal or ethnic affiliation of politicians is often used as a tool for political mobilization. The electorate are also manipulated in the process of mobilization on the basis of tribal affiliation of candidates and the parties they represents. In kebbi state, which is a composition of people with different tribal backgrounds, partisan politics is greatly influenced by the tribal links of the candidates. This makes candidates' selection by parties rancorous and devoid of standards and principles. A respondent observed:-

> Tribalism is another issue of concern in candidates' selection. For instance if the candidate A within a party is from Zuru and candidate "B " is from Argungu, people will convince you to vote for candidate that is from your town, largely because of tribal consideration. The expectation is that he is likely to bring benefits to the people of his tribal groups compared to candidates from other tribes who may favor their tribal groups if they clinch political positions. If for any reasons you vote for a candidate of rival tribal group you will be politically detested by your people.

Similarly, religion also play a major role in candidates' selection by parties in Nigeria and in Kebbi state in particular. As a relatively multi-religious society, there is fairly a sizable number of Christian population Kebbi state. Majority of the people are however Muslims. This division also plays out in politics generally and in intraparty politics in particular. Thus in the determination of candidates by parties, there is the concern as to the religious background of the candidates. If the candidate belongs to the minority religious group, his chances of being selected are dicey. This because in the general election, the party may perform woefully if the rival party play the religious card in its mobilization campaign. Many respondents corroborated this viewpoint and point to it as one of the major challenge undermining the credibility of candidates' selection by party institutions in Kebbi state.

On a general note, it can be argued that while a number of factors account for the weakness of parties, particularly in the candidates' selection process, it can be observed that high rate of ignorance in the society largely contributes to give weight to the factors such as unemployment, poverty, tribalism, godfatherism and religious bigotry, which affects the process of candidates' selection by parties in the state. This viewpoint was emphasized by one of the respondents as follows:

> Part of the problem is low level of education among youth as well as selfishness on the part of the politicians, which influence the choice of candidates by parties. A good example of this is in Argungu, between the two candidates: Senetor Isah Galaudu and Bello Dantani. Many people believe in the credibility and popularity of Bello Dantani because of his tract record, but he was said to be defeated by a rival candidate, who cannot match his competence and popularity.

Table-1.1. Summary of the interviews

CODES-PRIMARY-DOCUMENTS-TABLE								
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HU: No file								
Code-Filter: All [8]								
PD-Filter: All [7]								
Quotation-Filter: All [44]								
	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	TOTALS:
Deviation from Manifesto	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6
Godfatherism	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Lack of trust and confidence	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6
Money Politics	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Party's achievement	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6
Tribalism	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	6
Unemployment	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	6
Weak institution	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS:	7	7	7	6	6	6	5	44

Source: Authors computation (2016)

3. CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it is clear that a combination of factors account for near lack of credibility in the candidates' selection by parties in Kebbi state. A cross tabulation of the opinions of respondents suggest that parties in Kebbi state often deviate from their manifesto, which reduce the level of trust and confidence between the people and parties. The limited trust and confidence of the people in parties engender money

politics where candidates will prefer to offer different form of gratification in exchange for votes from delegates and party officials. This trend influences the emergence of godfathers who control party affairs by buying off party officials or influencing their selection in order to dictate party selection process. This way godfathers, nominate candidates of their choice with the view to controlling them and influencing their decisions in government. The godfathers often sponsor candidates by investing resources to control party machinery and recoup their investments with government contracts, funds allocation and appointment of their favorites strategic government positions. To achieve this, godfathers exploit the condition of youth unemployment and poverty who are cheaply recruited as thugs to defend the self-centered motives of the godfathers and candidates in parties and in general elections. This therefore makes partisan selection incoherent and undemocratic and thereby making violent mobilization by candidates and parties eminent in the state. Although parties' achievements and achievements by candidates sometimes count in the selection process, this is grossly undermined by the tribal and religious cards that played out frequently and commonly among the people of the state. Thus the weight of tribal and religious affiliation influences greatly the choice of candidates by parties in the state. This therefore suggest that multiple factors affects the credibility candidates' selection by party institutions, which is responsible for the weak party structures that could not perform their basic functions of governance both within the parties and in government

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