

# The unforgiving political war

## Power, Pride, and Struggle for Benue's soul

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In the ever-evolving political theatre of Benue State, one relationship has captured the imagination of analysts, observers, and citizens alike: the growing rift between Senator George Akume, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and the incumbent Governor of Benue State, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Iormem Alia. What began as a political alliance built on shared ambition has now transformed into a fierce rivalry marked by mistrust, betrayal, and a battle for absolute control over Benue's political destiny. For the first time in his long and eventful political career, Senator George Akume, a man once revered as the undisputed godfather of Benue politics — has met his match. Unlike his previous successors, including Gabriel Suswam and Samuel Ortom, who were often accused of dancing to Akume's political tune, Governor Hyacinth Alia has refused to be a puppet in the hands of any political master. This defiance has not only unsettled Akume's camp but has also redrawn the map of political power in the state.

From the very onset of his administration following the 2023 gubernatorial elections, Governor Alia demonstrated an unshakable resolve to govern independently. His appointment of Dr. Paul Biam as Chief of Staff was the first bold statement of intent — a decision that sent shockwaves through the political establishment. Dr. Biam, a known critic of Akume and a man celebrated for his fearlessness, symbolized Alia's readiness to dismantle the old order. To Akume and his allies, this was an open declaration of war — a rejection of the political “godfather” culture that had dominated Benue for over two decades.

The power struggle deepened when Akume attempted to influence the leadership of the Benue State House of Assembly. His preferred candidate, Mrs. Becky Orpin, was widely expected to emerge as Speaker, but Alia stood firmly behind Hon. Aondona Dajoh, defying his former benefactor's wishes. Though Dajoh later faced suspension amid impeachment controversies, the initial triumph served as another public reminder that Akume's once-iron grip on Benue politics had begun to weaken. Akume's frustration only grew when Governor Alia refused to endorse the list of commissioners and special advisers allegedly handpicked by the former governor's loyalists. Reports suggest that Akume sought to position his allies in “juicy ministries” — key portfolios that would have allowed him indirect control over state resources and decision-making. But Alia, ever determined to assert his independence, flatly rejected the proposal. In doing so, he not only fortified his image as a fearless reformer but also widened the gulf between himself and Akume beyond easy reconciliation.

*Political watchers believe that Alia's resistance is rooted in a deeper historical context — the people's yearning to break free from the grip of a political dynasty that has, for years, monopolized power and stifled progress. For many Benue citizens, Akume's brand of politics became synonymous with patronage, favoritism, and stagnation. They saw in Alia a fresh beginning — a leader driven not by allegiance to political godfathers but by commitment to the people's mandate.*

Indeed, in just two years of governance, Governor Alia has earned



remarkable praise for his pragmatic leadership style and visible achievements across various sectors. From infrastructural revival to civil service reforms and community empowerment projects, his administration is widely regarded as one of the most active and people-oriented in Benue's recent history. His courage to confront entrenched interests has reignited public hope that the state may finally be charting a new course — one defined by transparency, equity, and genuine development. For Senator George Akume, however, this new order represents both a political and personal affront. His decades-long influence — once unchallenged and absolute — now faces an existential threat. What was once a bond of loyalty between the political mentor and his protégé has degenerated into an all-out struggle for dominance. The animosity runs so deep that insiders claim even efforts by mutual associates to mediate peace have met a brick wall.

Today, the relationship between Akume and Alia stands as a powerful metaphor for the generational shift occurring in Nigerian politics — the gradual decline of godfatherism and the rise of independent leadership. While Akume's legacy as a political strategist and power broker remains intact, his inability to control Alia's government has exposed the limits of influence in a new era where voters increasingly demand performance over patronage. The question, then, is no longer whether Akume and Alia can reconcile — it is whether they even want to. For Akume, forgiveness would mean conceding defeat to a successor who dared to challenge his empire. For Alia, reconciliation could signify a retreat from the independence that has defined his administration. Between pride and politics, between control and conviction, the gulf continues to widen. And so, as Benue State watches this epic clash unfold, one truth remains undeniable: Governor Hyacinth Alia has rewritten the script of political power in Benue, and in doing so, he has forced even the mighty Senator George Akume to confront a reality he never imagined — that the age of unchallenged godfatherism in Benue may finally be coming to an end.

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