**ISSN: 2840 - 2917**
**Volume 12, Number 2, 2026**
**International Journal of Management & Social Science Research**

# GOD-FATHERISM AND POLITICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE IN RIVERS STATE.

**Nwuzoigwe, Kingsley Ph.D**
**Department of Political Science, Abia State University Uturu**
*nwuzoigwek@gmail.com, 08067120605*

**Abstract**

This paper sets out to investigate the influence of god-fatherism on political processes and governance in the Rivers State of Nigeria. Anchored fundamentally on the Elite Theory as the theoretical frame work to guide this study, the research however analyzed how powerful political figures, commonly branded as god-fathers, manipulate the selection of candidates, internal party democracy, electoral outcomes and good governance. The study therefore adopted descriptive survey design with a sample of 200 questionnaires of which 180 were correctly completed and retrieved. Data were collected from members of political parties, electoral officials, civil society, actors and voters across selected Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The findings revealed that political God-fathers exert significant control over party primaries through the imposition of preferred candidates and manipulation of the delegates' lists. Their financial and structural dominance undermines the tenets of internal democracy consequently breeding conflicts within parties. Additionally, the paper established a cogent connection between God-fatherism and electoral violence, as rival power blocks often sponsor thugs and manipulated results to secure political advantage. Furthermore, governance in Rivers State was found to be heavily influenced by God-father relationships, as elected officials often prioritize the interests of their sponsors over those of the electorates, thereby weakening accountability and transparency. The study then concludes that God-fatherism remains a major setback to democratic consolidation in Rivers State and Nigeria by extension. This paper therefore recommends measures to promote internal party democracy, strengthening institutional independence and enhancing greater participation as essential strategies for curbing the excesses of political God-fathers and promoting accountable governance in Rivers State.

***Keywords: Godfatherism, Politics, Governance, Implications, Rivers State, Political Process(es).***

## INTRODUCTION

The Political landscape in Nigeria, Since the return to democracy in 1999 has been defined by a variety of visible and invisible forces. Among the most dominant yet controversial influences on political outcomes is the role of potent individuals who operate behind the scenes to decide electoral results, government appointments and public policies. These figures often wield enormous power within political parties and across varied levels of government, creating a climate where true democratic participation is routinely compromised (Okolie, 2021; Ibrahim and Egwu, 2022). In the words of Eze and Onyishi (2023), political events in recent years across multiple Nigerian states have continued to reveal how deeply entrenched this influences has become. As they put it, the dynamics are not limited to pre-election activities such as endorsement and campaign funding. More disturbingly they posited, such individuals often interfere with the administrative functions of the government, dictating who gets what position, and how sate resources are allocated.

For Nwankwo (2020), their overarching control often results in a distortion of democratic norms, and in many cases, elected officials struggle to assert their independence from the hands that installed them in office.

In the same fashion, Akinbobola & Ojo (2023); Ezeani & Madueke (2024), noted that Rivers State has become one of the most prominent battle grounds for this kind of political dominance in Nigeria. In recent years, they observed, political tensions in Rivers State have highlighted the persistent

struggle between elected leaders and their former political benefactors. The dramatic fallout between certain sitting governors and their political predecessors in the state have exemplified the difficult balance between loyalty to powerful backers and the responsibility to the electorates. These tensions have often led to factional divisions within parties, legal battles over control of political party structures and violent confrontations during electioneering periods. With particular reference to Rivers State, Adewumi & Fagbolun observed that these dynamics have evolved into a pattern where internal party wrangling are fueled by the ambitions and expectations of those who see themselves as kingmakers. As a consequence, elected leaders often face pressure to cede powers, control budgets or allocate appointments to impress their political patrons. Thus Chiweuba (2022) opined that the long-term consequences of this ugly political culture is the weakening of public trust in democratic institutions. The perceived futility of the electoral process where outcomes of an election are pre-arranged and candidates are handicapped has culminated in voter apathy particularly among the youth and first time voters. Many Nigerians now among the youth conceive politics as a closed game, inaccessible to those without elite sponsorship or personal wealth. This scenario contributes significantly to the growing disconnect between the government and the governed thereby undermining the quest for participatory democracy.

Within political parties scope, this influence has expectedly stifled internal democracy. Rather than encourage competitive primaries and merit based selection of candidates, diverse political parties operate through the imposition of preferred candidates by the potent figures within or outside the party hierarchy. This according to Ogundiya (2020); Alabi and Akintunde (2021) has made party platforms a battle field of elite power struggles rather than vehicles for national development or ideological engagement. With reference to Rivers State, the dominance of certain individuals within major political parties has steadily led to the collapse of party consensus with internal party divisions spilling into public governance and policy paralysis.

More disheartening is the relationship between this phenomenon and electoral violence. In an attempt to retain control, these unpatriotic political actors often deploy thugs, manipulate security agencies, or even bribe electoral officials to secure victory for their loyalists. This trend according to Ojo et al (2022), not only disrupts elections but creates a hostile environment that discourages civic engagements and endangers lives. In such climate elections cease to test the will of the people and become a contest for financial might and political manipulations.

However, within the realm of governance, Chukwu et al (2021), posit that this undue influence has rendered accountability elusive. Office holders they contended, who rise through the sponsorship of powerful figures are often more loyal to their benefactors than to the electorates. This ultimately affects policy priorities, public expenditure and even project distribution as actions are frequently designed to benefit a few rather than serve the larger population. The culture therefore of rewarding political loyalty over competence has resulted in widespread inefficiency and deepened public discontent.

Despite spirited reforms that cut-across amendments to the Electoral Act to efforts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to promote transparent elections, the influence of the powerful figures persists adapting to each election cycle. While older tactics Ibrahim (2023) notes involved brute force and coercion, modern methods now include digital propaganda, financial inducement and control of party delegates and judicial processes. This evolution makes the problem more complex and deeply rooted in Nigeria's democratic space.

In particular, there is an immediate need to re-examine the role for these power dynamos in Nigeria's political journey. A close understanding of how they influence elections, governance and political accountability especially in states such as Rivers will be essential for crafting methodologies that engender democratic participation. As Nigeria continues her journey toward consolidating democracy, overcoming this entrenched culture of behind-the-scene control becomes critical to ensuring governance that reflects the collective will of the people (Ezeani et al, 2024).

The study therefore sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine how political godfathers influence the emergence of candidates in political party primaries in Rivers State.
2. Investigate the effects of godfatherism on internal democracy within political parties in Rivers State.
3. Evaluate the impact of godfatherism on governance, with respect to accountability and public service delivery in Rivers State.

**Hypothesis**

Baridam (1995), sees hypothesis as a statement of expected relationship between dependent and independent variables. Consequently, this study shall seek to raise data and arguments to test the following stated hypotheses:

$HO_1$: There is a significant relationship between godfatherism and candidate selection during party primaries in Rivers State.

$HO_2$: Godfatherism has a significant effect on governance and political accountability in Rivers State.

**Clarification of Concepts**

**Godfatherism**

Godfatherism constitutes a pivotal aspect of the political landscape in Nigeria, describing the phenomenon whereby politically and economically influential individuals, often referred to as political godfathers, wield enormous control over political parties, electoral processes and governance outcomes. These individuals exert influence of leveraging their wealth, social networks and political clout to shape the selection of candidates, determine electoral outcomes and influence the formulation and implementation of policy. Central to the concept of godfatherism is the reliance on clientelist politics, a system in which loyalty is exchanged for favours, resources or positions of authority. Ake (1981) and Omotola (2010) maintained that this arrangement often results in elected officials prioritizing the interests of their godfathers over those of the electorates, thus undermining accountability, transparency and smooth democratic governance. The origin of godfatherism in Nigeria are deeply interwoven with the country's colonial and post-colonial political evolution. During the colonial period, governance structures were highly centralized and political participation was restricted to a narrow educated elite. This framework created a political culture in which hierarchical authority and patron-client relations became normalized.

Ojo (2007), notes that the military era further entrenched these dynamics by limiting civilian participation and concentrating authority in the hands of a few, inadvertently creating conditions that would facilitate the emergence of godfathers once democratic governance was re-introduced. However, the transition to civil rule in 1999 marked a critical turning point in the institutionalization of godfatherism. With the coming on stream of democracy, political parties became vehicles for electoral competition. Most political parties were fragile, lacked internal democracy and had a weak mechanism for candidates' selection. This institutional weakness allowed wealthy and influential individuals to dominate party structures, dictate nominations and shape electoral outcomes.

As Joseph (1991) and Omotola (2010) posited, the reliance of candidates on godfathers for financial backing and political mobilization entrenched the system, thereby creating a cycle in which loyalty to godfathers became a prerequisite for political survival. To this end, political godfatherism became central to both party politics and governance as their support often determined who could access any political office.

Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in the persistence of godfatherism in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large. Hierarchical social structures, deference to authority and patron-client relationships are deeply imbedded in many Nigerian communities, rendering loyalty to influential figures both respected and culturally acceptable. These social norms create a conducive environment for godfathers to assert their influence, as individuals and groups often perceive the guidance and protection of a godfather as vital for political advancement or socio-economic security. Additionally, Joseph (1991) contended that the economic dimension to godfatherism cannot be

overstressed; godfathers, often affluent elites, possess the financial resources to fund campaigns, provide inducements and sustain patronage networks, thereby consolidating their authority over both candidates and party structures. For instance, he added, in states such as Lagos, Anambra and Rivers, godfatherism played decisive roles in determining gubernatorial candidates and influencing the legislative composition of State Assemblies. Such interventions extended beyond electoral processes into administrative governance, where godfathers often dictated key appointments, budgetary allocations and policy priorities to ensure their continued influence.

In effect, godfatherism in Nigeria, fester by a combination of historical, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors which create an atmosphere conducive to the emergence and persistence of influential political patrons. In this connection, Ojo (2007) and Omotola (2010) posited that the absence of robust institutional checks allows godfathers to consolidate authority and influence both elections and governance, with minimal resistance.

In conclusion, the effects and implications of godfatherism are extensive and multidimensional. Politically, it undermines democratic principles and accountability; administratively, it distorts governance and policy execution; socially, it exacerbates inequality and economically, it shapes resource allocation in favour of elite networks. Additionally, godfatherism contributes to political instability, erodes public trust, limits leadership renewal and presents significant challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Rivers State particularly and Nigeria by extension. Comprehending these consequences is critical for designing strategies and devices aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, promoting internal party democracy and enhancing accountability and inclusive governance within the Nigerian polity.

On a broader scale, Joseph (1991) observes that godfatherism limits leadership renewal and political innovation; the dominance of established patrons restricts opportunities for emerging political actors, reducing the influx of fresh ideas, new policy approaches and innovative governance strategies. This stagnation can perpetuate ineffective leadership practices, reduce institutional adaptability and hinder the capacity of government to respond to contemporary socio-economic challenges. Furthermore, godfatherism has comparative implications for democratization in other developing contexts. While political patronage exists in many countries, the intensity and pervasiveness of godfather influence in Nigeria highlights the challenges of consolidating democracy where informal power structures can override formal institutional processes (Barkan, 2009).

## Politics

Politics is a fundamental aspect of human society, encompassing the processes, structures and practices through which power is acquired, exercised and organized to make collective decisions for a community or state. However, Easton (1965) and Heywood (2013) perceived politics as involving the negotiation of interests, the distribution of resources and the establishment of rules that govern social interactions with the ultimate goal of maintaining order, promoting welfare and resolving conflicts. In essence, politics provides the framework through which societies determine who holds authority, how decisions are made and whose interests are prioritized. Lasswell (1936) famously conceptualized politics as "who gets what, when and how", stressing the distributive and power-oriented nature of political activity. This perspective highlights that politics is basically concerned with competition for power and resources, whether within governments, organizations or communities. For Easton (1965), politics is defined as the authoritative allocation of values for a society, focusing on the systemic and institutional dimensions of political decision-making.

In the Nigerian context, politics assumes unique dimensions shaped by historical, social and cultural factors. The country's diverse ethnic composition, colonial legacy, and experiences of military rule have all influenced political structures, behaviour and culture. Nigerian politics is characterized by the interplay of formal institutions such as political parties, the legislature and the executive with informal networks of influence, including patronage systems, ethnic associations and political godfathers. These interactions shape electoral processes, governance and policy formulation,

reflecting the complex realities of political power in a heterogeneous society (Omotola, 2010; Joseph, 1991).

However, politics serves several key functions in society. Firstly, it facilitates decision-making and governance, providing mechanisms for resolving disputes and coordinating collective action. Secondly, politics enables representation and participation, allowing citizens or groups to influence policy and decision-making processes. Thirdly, politics provides social control and legitimacy, establishing norms, laws, and procedures that regulate behaviour and maintain order. Fourthly, politics contributes to stability and adaptation within society by providing structured avenues for contestation, negotiation and compromise. This mitigates conflicts and enables societies to adapt to changing circumstances. Finally, politics is instrumental to the allocation of resources, by determining how economic, social and political benefits are distributed across society (Heywood, 2013).

Scholarly discourse recognises that politics is inherently relational and context-dependent. It involves power dynamics between individuals, groups and institutions, with authority often contested and negotiated. In many societies including Nigeria, politics is also shaped by socio-cultural norms, historical experiences and economic structures. Ethnic affiliations, religious identity and social hierarchies often intersect with formal political mechanisms, influencing participation, policy outcomes and governance effectiveness. This interplay highlights the complexity of political processes where formal institutions operate alongside informal structures and networks of influence (Joseph, 1991; Omotola, 2010). Furthermore, politics is both a process and an arena. As a process, it encompasses negotiation, bargaining, persuasion and decision-making. As an arena, politics provides the stage in which actors, government officials, political parties, interest groups and citizens compete for influence and authority. This duality explains why politics is simultaneously normative, prescriptive and analytical; it concerns ideals of governance and justice, the reality of power struggles and the study of political behaviour and institutions (Easton, 1965; Heywood, 2013).

In Nigeria, the practical exercise of politics is often interwined with challenges such as electoral violence, corruption, elite domination and clientelism. Political actors engage in strategic behaviour to secure office, mobilize supporters and maintain influence, reflecting the competitive and sometimes contentious nature of the political landscape.

In conclusion, therefore, the dimensions and functions of politics are multifaceted, encompassing institutional, behavioural, cultural, social and economic aspects. Politics not only prioritizes authority and governance but also facilitates participation, representation, conflict resolution, resource allocation and social stability. In Nigeria, these dimensions operate in a context characterized by diversity, historical legacies, social norms and disparities, making politics both complex and central to understanding the processes of governance, development and democratic consolidation.

## Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Elite Theory, which provides a useful lens for comprehending the influence of powerful individuals, often referred to as political godfathers, on political decision-making and governance structures in Nigeria, with particular reference to Rivers State. The Elite Theory was first developed in the late and early 20th centuries by Italian sociologists and political theorists such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), and subsequently expanded by Robert Michels (1876–1936). These scholars shared a consensus belief that in every society, regardless of its democratic or autocratic structure, a minority group of elites always dominate the political power and control major decisions that shape the lives of the majority.

Pareto (1916), in his work *The Mind and Society*, argued that societies are always governed by a minority group he referred to as the "elite", who possesses superior organizational skills, access to resources, or strategic control of political institutions. Mosca (1939) observes that political class rule is inevitable because all societies require some form of organized leadership, which seldom concentrates power in the hands of a few. Michels (1911), in his seminal work, introduced the concept of the "iron law of oligarchy," which posits that all forms of organization, including

democracies, inevitably develop oligarchic tendencies because the few who manage the organizational processes acquire more power than the rest. Together, all these theorists laid the groundwork for understanding how a relatively small group within society can control political structures and maintain dominance even within systems that appear ostensibly democratic.

In the Nigerian perspective, the dominance of a few individuals or groups in political decision-making is not a novel phenomenon. The political landscape is shaped by a network of powerful individuals, often wealthy, influential, and well-connected, who control political parties, dictate the emergence of candidates, and determine the outcomes of elections behind the scenes. These individuals, often referred to as "godfathers," fit appropriately within the framework of elite theory.

The relevance, however, of Elite Theory to this study is lucid and remarkable. In Rivers State, like many other parts of Nigeria, the political space is heavily manipulated by a few individuals who exercise disproportionate power over party politics, elections, and governance. These elites function not only as financiers of electioneering campaigns but also as gatekeepers of political opportunities. They often control the nomination processes in political parties, influence electoral commissions indirectly, and use their financial clout and connections to manipulate political outcomes.

In particular, Rivers State has witnessed multiple episodes where political tensions, electoral violence, and governance crises were closely tied to struggles between rival Godfathers/between Godfathers and Their Godsons. These power tussles exemplify what the Elite Theory describes as the capture of democratic institutions by a powerful few who operate above the law and with little accountability to the public. For example, internal party disputes, particularly during primaries, are often not about ideology or the people's needs but about which elite figure will impose their preferred candidate on the party (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014).

The theory also helps to elucidate why political office holders in Rivers State often prioritize the interests of their sponsors over the welfare of their constituents. Since their political survival is tied more to their loyalty to their godfathers than to popular support, the principles of accountability, transparency and service delivery are frequently undermined. In this sense, Elite Theory reveals the limitations of electoral democracy in settings where informal power structures dominate formal institutions (Omotola, 2007).

More than that, Elite Theory provides a valuable theoretical foundation for analyzing godfatherism in Nigerian politics, with particular reference to Rivers State. It further explains the structural dominance of a few powerful individuals over political processes and offers valuable insight into how this dominance compromises democracy, fuels political instability and weakens governance. Situating godfatherism within the broader context of elite capture and oligarchic control, this study tends to critically assess the implications for democratic governance and proffers pathways for political reforms.

## Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the impact of godfatherism on political processes and governance in Rivers State.

The choice of this design, however, is informed by its effectiveness in capturing public perceptions, behaviours and experiences concerning political dynamics. It permits the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data that reflect the realities in the area under investigation.

Expectedly, the population of the study comprises registered voters, political party members, electoral officials, community leaders and civil society actors across key local government areas in Rivers State. These categories of respondents were chosen because they are actively engaged in or affected by political decisions and electoral outcomes in the State.

A sample size of 200 respondents was selected using purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure representation from different political zones and interest groups within Rivers State. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire consisting of both close-ended and Likert-scale questions designed to elicit responses on issues of candidate selection, internal party democracy and governance outcomes.

Furthermore, primary data were obtained directly from the administered questionnaires, while secondary data were sourced from academic journals, books, electoral reports and relevant government publications. The data collected were analyzed using simple statistical tools such as frequency counts and percentages, with the view of showing the percentage differences in the respondents' responses to questions posed.
This methodological approach was considered most appropriate for the paper as it combines both numerical evidence and stakeholder perceptions to critically examine the influence of godfatherism on politics and governance in Rivers State.

**Influence on Post-Election Disputes**
Rivers State, located in the Southern region of Nigeria, occupies a strategic position within the Niger Delta, one of Nigeria's most economically and culturally significant areas. Created on May 27, 1967, from the former Eastern Region of Nigeria, Rivers State was established during the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon, in the context of state creation aimed at addressing ethnic diversity and promoting administrative efficiency (Suberu, 2001). The State was carved out to provide greater political representation and autonomy for the various ethnic groups in the region, particularly the Ikwerre, Ogoni, Ijaw, Etche and other minority communities. Over the years, Rivers State has evolved as a focal point of political, economic and cultural activities in the Niger Delta.
However, Ikelebge (2013) notes that godfatherism has been one of the major factors fueling post-election disputes in Nigeria's democratic experience. After electioneering, political godfathers often interfere with governance and power-sharing arrangements, demanding rewards and control from their protégés. When these expectations are not met, tensions arise, leading to prolonged political disputes, court battles and sometimes violent confrontations. Moreover, in many Nigerian States, godfathers see elections and electioneering as investments from which they must reap returns. Their post-election involvement in decision-making, such as appointments, contracts awarded and revenue allocation, creates friction between them and their elected leaders. This struggle for dominance often leads to crises that threaten governance stability. For instance, in Anambra State, the infamous dispute between Chris Uba and Governor Chris Ngige in 2003 escalated into election violence, resulting in Ngige's abduction and the destruction of government property when he refused to remain subservient to his godfather (Anifowose, 2011). Similarly, in Oyo State, the post-election fallout between Lamidi Adedibu and Governor Rashidi Ladoja between 2004 and 2006, Albert (2005) observes, led to violent clashes and a temporary removal of the Governor from office.
Okoli and Iortyer (2014) periscopes Rivers State and notes that godfatherism in Rivers State, which is our case study has consistently shaped post-election disputes. They opined that after the 2015 general elections, the political struggle between Rotimi Amaechi and Nyesom Wike led to a plethora of tribunal cases and violent protests across the State. The conflict thus deepened as both men fought for political control of the State's resources and institutions. A similar scenario re-emerged in the 2023–2025 political crises involving Governor Siminalayi Fubara and former Governor Nyesom Wike, who currently doubles as the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).
Following Dr. Fubara's victory in the 2023 Governorship election, tension escalated when he resisted attempts by Wike to dictate administrative decisions and appointments. This disagreement triggered a serious post-election conflict, culminating in the Rivers State House of Assembly crisis of October 2023, where lawmakers loyal to Wike initiated an impeachment move against Governor Fubara, leading to the burning of the Assembly complex and violent confrontations between rival groups (Daily Trust, 2023). According to Premium Times report (2024), the dispute continued into 2024 with parallel Assembly sittings and divided party loyalties, reflecting the deep influence of godfatherism on post-election instability. Such developments, Omotola (2010) notes, show that godfatherism not only affects the electoral process but also extends into the post-election phase, where political godfathers attempt to control policy decisions, appointments and resource allocation. When resisted, they deploy political structures, media influence, and loyal legislators to frustrate their successors, thereby paralyzing governance. In sum, therefore, godfatherism contributes

remarkably to post-election disputes by turning democratic victories into battlegrounds for political supremacy. The persistent conflict between Wike and Fubara exemplifies how the quest for control by political godfathers undermines peace, governance and democratic consolidation in Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

**Data Presentation And Analysis Showing Politics Of Godfatherism As Agent Of Poor Quality Governance In Rivers State.**

As indicated in the research Methodology, two hundred (200) copies of questionnaires were administered. However, only one hundred and eighty (180) were successfully retrieved.

The questionnaire is divided into two sections A and B. section "A" of the questionnaire deals with the personal data variables of the respondents as sex, age, marital status, educational qualification and employment status. While Section "B" tackles issues in relation to Godfatherism and politics in the Rivers state of Nigeria. The analysis shall focus on data on section "B" table

**Section A: Bio-Data Information of Respondents**

**Distribution of questionnaire based on sex**

| Sex | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 100 | 56.5% |
| Female | 80 | 44.4% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**Distribution of questionnaire based on age**

| Age | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|---|---|
| 20-30 | 36 | 20% |
| 31-40 | 45 | 25% |
| 41-50 | 54 | 30% |
| 51-60 | 45 | 25% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**Distribution of questionnaire based on marital status**

| Marital status | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|---|---|
| Single | 117 | 65% |
| Married | 45 | 25% |
| Widow | 7 | 4% |
| Divorced | 11 | 6% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**Distribution of questionnaire based on educational qualification**

| Educational qualification | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|---|---|
| SSCE | 36 | 20% |
| OND/NCE | 45 | 25% |
| HND/B.SC | 72 | 40% |
| Post graduate | 27 | 15% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**Distribution of questionnaire based on employment status**

| Employment status | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|---|---|
| Farmers | 45 | 25% |
| Self-employed | 54 | 30% |
| Civil servants | 36 | 20% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Others | 45 | 25% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**Sources**: Field survey across Rivers State, 2026.

**Section B:**

**Table 4.2.1**

**Does Political godfathers influence candidates selection for electioneering in Rivers State?**

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 90 | 50% |
| Agree | 60 | 33% |
| Disagree | 20 | 11% |
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | 6% |
| **Total** | 180 | 100% |

**Source**: Field Survey across Rivers State, 2026.

**Table 4.2.2**

**Does Godfatherism Affect Internal Democracy Within Political Parties in Rivers State?**

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 92 | 51% |
| Agree | 63 | 35% |
| Disagree | 15 | 8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | 6% |
| **Total** | 180 | 100% |

**Source**: Field survey across Rivers State, 2026.

**Table 4.2.3**

**Does Godfatherism Shape Governance Outcomes and Political Accountability in the State?**

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 96 | 53% |
| Agree | 62 | 34% |
| Disagree | 13 | 7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 6% |
| **Total** | 180 | 100% |

**Source**: Field survey across Rivers State, 2026.

## ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

**Research Question 1 for Section B: In What Ways Do Political Godfathers Influence Candidates' Selection in Rivers State?**

Table 4.2.1 of Section B shows that 90 respondents, representing 50%, strongly agreed that political godfathers control party primaries and impose their preferred candidates on the party, while 60 respondents, representing 33%, agreed. However, 20 respondents, representing 11%, disagreed, whereas 10 respondents, representing 6%, strongly disagreed.

These figures and their percentages justify the fact that a majority of respondents are in the affirmative that political godfathers have absolute control over the candidates' selection process for electioneering in Rivers State. This supports the view of Ikelebge (2013) that Nigerian politics is often dictated by powerful elites who decide who gets into power.

**Research Question 2 for Section B: How Does Godfatherism Affect Internal Democracy Within Political Parties in Rivers State?**

Table 4.2.2 of Section B indicates vividly that 92 respondents, representing 51%, strongly agree to the notion that godfatherism undermines fair competition and free participation in party affairs, while 63 respondents, representing 35%, agreed. However, 15 respondents, representing 8%, disagreed, whereas 10 respondents, representing 6%, strongly disagreed.

The figure differential suggests that most respondents are confident that godfatherism negatively impinges on internal party democracy by discouraging open and fair participation in political processes. This aligns with Omotola (2010), who notes that the dominance of godfathers converts political parties into instruments of personal control instead of fair participation.

**Research Question 3 for Section B: How Does Godfatherism Shape Governance Outcomes and Political Accountability in Rivers State?**

Table 4.2.3 of Section B portrays in clear terms that 96 respondents, representing 53%, strongly agreed that elected officials serve the pockets of their godfathers rather than the citizens. While 62 respondents, representing 34%, agreed, 13 respondents, representing 7%, disagreed, whereas 9 respondents, representing 6%, strongly objected. These figures presuppose that most respondents believe elected leaders in Rivers State prioritize the self-seeking interests of their political godfathers over public welfare, thereby undermining accountability in governance. This aptly confirms the experience in Rivers State, where the conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his godfather, Nyesom Wike, has disrupted governance and legislative stability since 2023.

**TEST OF HYPOTHESIS**

The test of hypotheses in this study assumed the form of reflecting on the tables that have questions appertaining to the hypotheses and weighing the responses in relation to simple percentages.

Hypothesis $H_{01}$ states that "There is a significant relationship between godfatherism and candidates' selection during party primaries in Rivers State."

To test this hypothesis, Table 4.2.1 will be of immense help thus:

Research Question: Is it correct to say that there is a significant relationship between godfatherism and candidates' selection during party primaries in Rivers State?

Table 4.2.1:

| **Responses** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 90 | 50% |
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | 6% |
| Agree | 60 | 33% |
| Disagree | 20 | 11% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**SOURCE**: Field Survey across Rivers State, 2026.

The above table indicates that 90 (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 60 (33%) of the respondents agreed, 20 (11%) of the respondents disagreed, while 10 (6%) strongly disagreed. These figures suggest that there is a significant relationship between godfatherism and candidates' selection at party primaries in Rivers State. Once more, when we reflect on the fact that 90 (50%) strongly agreed is higher than the 10 (6%) that strongly disagreed. It is therefore incontrovertible to admit that hypothesis $H_{01}$ is true and acceptable.

Hypothesis $H_{02}$

Hypothesis $H_{02}$ states that: "Godfatherism has a significant effect on governance and political accountability in Rivers State." To test this hypothesis, Table 4.2.3 comes in handy thus:
Research Question: Would you agree that godfatherism has a significant effect on governance and political accountability in Rivers State?

**Table 4.2.3**

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 96 | 53% |
| Agree | 62 | 34% |
| Disagree | 13 | 7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 6% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

**SOURCE**: Field survey across Rivers State, 2026.

The above table clearly demonstrates that a large number of the respondents, numbering 96 (53%), strongly agreed; 62 (34%) agreed, while 13 (7%) disagreed and 9 (6%) strongly disagreed.
These figures to a large extent portray that godfatherism has a significant effect on governance and political accountability in Rivers State, and considering that 96 (53%) respondents strongly agreed, which outweighs the 9 (6%) that responded strongly disagreed, therefore hypothesis $H_{02}$ can also be adjudged as true and acceptable for this study.

**Discussion of Findings**

Based on the results obtained, the research findings of this study are as follows:

i. The findings from the study reveal that political godfatherism remains a dominant force in shaping electoral and governance outcomes in Rivers State. Data collected from the respondents show that most participants agreed that godfathers strongly influence candidates' selection, party primaries and political appointments. This aptly supports the view of Ikelebe (2013) that Nigerian politics is often dictated by power elites who determine who gets into power rather than democratic competition.

ii. Additionally, the study found that internal party democracy is greatly weakened by godfatherism. Many respondents affirmed that party members have little or no voice in decision-making processes as godfathers impose loyalists during primaries. This lends credence to the findings of Omodia (2010), who observed that the dominance of godfathers converts political parties into instruments of personal manipulation rather than platforms for fair democratic participation.

iii. Furthermore, the study revealed that godfatherism negatively impacts governance and accountability. Most respondents agreed that elected officials prioritize the self-seeking interests of their financiers over the needs of the people, ultimately culminating in corruption, poor service delivery and lack of transparency. This scenario reflects the experience in Rivers State, where the conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his godfather, Nyesom Wike, has disrupted governance and legislative stability since 2023. The crisis rooted in godfather control demonstrates how political loyalty to sponsors can undermine state administration and public confidence.

iv. The findings of the study indicate that godfatherism undermines democracy, promotes corruption in government, encourages electoral manipulation, culminates in post-election instability and threatens political stability in Rivers State and Nigeria in general. However, unless party systems are ideologically reformed to promote internal democracy and reduce, to the barest minimum, elite interference, political peace and good governance in the state will remain threatened.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the hydra-headed monster of godfatherism has become a major obstacle to democratic consolidation in Rivers State. At present, it has eroded internal democracy, influenced electoral processes and limited the independence of public officials. The persistent interference of godfathers in governance has promoted corruption and reduced accountability. The study therefore concludes that political godfatherism is a major source of post-election conflict and legislative crisis, as exemplified in the political feud between Governor Fubara and his godfather Wike, which has disrupted smooth governance and weakened public trust in democratic institutions. However, political godfatherism remains one of the greatest threats to effective governance, peace and the overall development of Rivers State.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above analysis, the following recommendations in this study are considered germane:

1. Political parties should freely adopt transparent procedures in the selection of candidates to stand for election and ensure that all members participate unhindered in primaries without undue interference from influential financiers.
2. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should enforce stricter regulations to prevent manipulation of electoral processes by political elites and their allies.
3. Agencies such as EFCC and ICPC should actively monitor political financing and campaign expenditure to reduce the undue financial powers of godfathers.
4. Youth bodies and political party members should be conscientized on the dangers of godfatherism and encouraged to participate actively in the decision-making processes.
5. The judiciary, legislature and civil society organizations should be empowered to act independently and resist undue political manipulation.
6. Elected government officials should prioritize accountability to the electorates over loyalty to political sponsors with a view to promoting service delivery and building public confidence.

## REFERENCES

Adewumi, A., & Fagbohun, O. (2022). Political leadership and democratic stability in Nigeria. Lagos: Sunrise Publishers.

Ake, C. (1981). A political economy of Africa. Longman.

Alabi, O., & Akintunde, D. (2021). Party politics and elite control in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Nigerian Journal of Political Inquiry, 7(1), 44–58.

Albert, I. O. (2005). Explaining godfatherism in Nigeria's politics. African Sociological Review, 9(2), 79–105.

Akinbobola, O., & Ojo, E. (2023). Power and influence in Nigeria's electoral politics. Journal of African Governance Studies, 11(3), 99–118.

Anifowose, R. (2011). Violence and politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba experience. Lagos: Bookman Publishers.

Ayoade, J. A. A. (2008). Godfather politics in Nigeria. In I. O. Albert (Ed.), Perspectives on the 2003 elections in Nigeria (pp. 85–92). Abuja: IDASA.

Barkan, J. D. (2009). Political clientelism in Africa: Democracy and development in comparative perspective. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Chinweuba, A. (2022). Political instability and governance failure in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. African Journal of Social Sciences, 9(4), 107–117.

Daily Trust. (2023, October 31). Rivers Assembly crisis: Hoodlums burn complex after impeachment move against Governor Fubara. Retrieved from https://dailytrust.com

Eze, E., & Onyishi, E. (2023). Political succession and elite control in Nigeria. Journal of Political Studies and Development, 6(2), 61–79.

Ezeani, E. C., & Maduekwe, M. (2024). Youth and political participation in Nigeria's democracy. International Journal of African Studies, 8(1), 30–45.

Ibrahim, J. (2023). Democracy and elite manipulation in Africa. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development.

Ibrahim, J., & Egwu, S. (2022). Elections and the challenges of governance in Nigeria. Abuja: CDD Publications.

Ikelegbe, A. (2013). Political parties and violence in Nigeria. Journal of Political Studies, 8(1), 45–62.

Joseph, R. A. (1991). Democracy and prebendal politics in Nigeria: The rise and fall of the Second Republic. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Michels, R. (1911). Political parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy. New York: Free Press.

Mosca, G. (1939). The ruling class. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Nwankwo, C. (2020). Patronage, loyalty and the politics of godfatherism in Nigeria. African Journal of Politics and Society, 5(2), 33–50.

Ojo, E. (2007). Godfatherism and the politics of power in Nigeria. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Ojo, E., & Bamidele, O. (2022). Democracy, corruption and the crisis of political succession in Nigeria. Nigerian Political Science Review, 10(2), 87–97.

Okafor, C., & Chukwueze, A. (2021). Elite control and democratic accountability in Nigeria. Journal of Contemporary African Politics, 9(3), 54–68.

Okoli, A. C., & Iorkyer, F. (2014). Political thuggery and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Global Journal of Political Science and Administration, 2(1), 77–92.

Okolie, A. (2021). Godfatherism and democratic decay in Nigeria. Journal of Political Science and Development Studies, 3(2), 66–83.

Omodia, S. M. (2010). Political parties and party politics in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. Trends in Political Science, 12(1), 24–30.

Omodia, S. A., & Egwuomi, V. (2020). Godfather politics and democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Nigerian Journal of Public Administration and Policy Studies, 8(2), 13–27.

Omotala, J. A. (2007). Godfatherism and the menace of electoral violence in Nigeria. African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 1(3), 77–83.

Omotala, J. A. (2010). Godfatherism: A threat to democracy in Nigeria. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers.

Onyeiwu, E. C. (2025). Godfatherism and politics in Rivers State [Unpublished project work]. University of Port Harcourt.

Pareto, V. (1916). The mind and society. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Premium Times. (2024, February 2). Rivers crisis: Wike, Fubara feud deepens as Assembly factions hold parallel sittings. Retrieved from https://premiumtimesng.com