



RESEARCH ARTICLE

POWER- POLITICS AND THE INFLUENCE OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA: A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN RIVERS STATE, 2024-2026

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ABSTRACT

Godfatherism remains a deeply entrenched informal institution shaping democratic practice in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This paper examines power-politics and the resurgence of godfather influence in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026, situating the crisis within Nigeria's broader neopatrimonial political culture. Rivers State, historically marked by intense elite rivalry and resource-driven contestation, provides a compelling case for analyzing the tension between formal democratic structures and informal patron-client networks. Anchored in Elite Theory and Neopatrimonialism, the study explains how political power is concentrated within a small ruling class that manipulates democratic institutions through patronage and loyalty networks. Using qualitative methods, including documentary analysis, media reports, and elite interviews, the study argues that recent political tensions reflect a structural struggle between institutional governance and personalized power control. Godfatherism operates through domination of party primaries, legislative alignment, patronage distribution, and strategic deployment of security and judicial processes, resulting in governance instability and declining public trust. The findings indicate that its persistence stems from weak institutionalization, monetized electoral politics, and entrenched elite interests that undermine accountability. The Rivers State crisis therefore represents a broader national struggle for democratic liberation from oligarchic capture. The study recommends comprehensive reform of political party structures to guarantee enforceable intra-party democracy, including stronger regulatory oversight of party primaries by the Independent National Electoral Commission and transparent, rule-based candidate selection processes to curb elite dominance.

Keywords: *Godfatherism, power-politics, rivers state, elite theory, neopatrimonialism.*

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Politics in every society revolves around the acquisition, retention, and utilization of power. The struggle for political power has remained a defining feature of political systems across the world, particularly in developing democracies where institutions are often weak and political actors rely heavily on informal networks of influence to achieve their objectives. In such environments, political competition frequently transcends constitutional processes and manifests through patron-client relationships, elite dominance, and godfatherism (Azeez, 2009; Joseph, 1987). Consequently, power politics has become an enduring feature of governance, shaping political behaviour, leadership recruitment, policy implementation, and democratic outcomes.

In Nigeria, the phenomenon of godfatherism has emerged as one of the most significant dimensions of power politics. Godfatherism refers to a political arrangement in which influential political actors sponsor, mentor, and facilitate the emergence of political office holders in exchange for loyalty, political control, and access to state resources (Albert, 2005). While political mentorship is common in democratic systems, the Nigerian experience demonstrates that godfatherism often undermines democratic principles by subordinating public interest to personal and elite interests (Akinola, 2009). As a result, elected officials frequently become accountable to political patrons rather than the electorate, thereby weakening democratic governance and institutional development.

The dynamics of power politics and godfatherism have been particularly evident in Rivers State, one of Nigeria's most politically strategic and economically significant states. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Rivers State has witnessed intense political contests characterized by elite influence, patronage networks, and struggles for control of political structures (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). The state's strategic importance as a major oil-producing region has further intensified competition among political actors seeking control over governmental institutions and resources.

The period between 2024 and 2026 represents one of the most dramatic phases in the political history of Rivers State. During this period, a fierce political conflict emerged between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his political benefactor and predecessor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, who later became Minister of the Federal Capital Territory. What initially appeared to be a disagreement over governance and political appointments gradually evolved into a broader struggle for political supremacy, control of state institutions, and influence over the future direction of Rivers politics (The Guardian, 2025; Punch, 2025). The crisis exposed the enduring influence of godfatherism in Nigerian politics and highlighted the challenges faced by political office holders seeking autonomy from their political sponsors.

Many political analysts interpreted the Rivers crisis as a classic struggle between political godfatherism and political liberation. The conflict reflected an attempt by an incumbent governor to assert independence from the influence of his political sponsor, thereby raising important questions regarding democratic accountability, political autonomy, and the sustainability of patron-client politics in Nigeria (Premium Times, 2025). Consequently, the Rivers experience provides a contemporary case for understanding how power politics and godfatherism continue to shape governance outcomes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.



Democratic governance is expected to promote political accountability, popular participation, and the emergence of leaders through the free choice of the electorate. However, the Nigerian political system has continued to be characterized by power politics and godfatherism, whereby influential political actors exert enormous control over political processes and elected officials. Although scholars have extensively examined godfatherism as a challenge to democratic governance, political instability, and electoral integrity in Nigeria (Albert, 2005; Azeez, 2009), the phenomenon has remained deeply entrenched in the country's political landscape.

The persistence of godfatherism has generated recurring conflicts between political godfathers and their protégés, particularly when elected office holders attempt to assert independence from the influence of their political sponsors. Such conflicts often result in governance crises, institutional paralysis, political polarization, and struggles for control of state resources and political structures. Despite existing democratic institutions and constitutional provisions, political power in many states continues to be shaped by informal networks of patronage and elite dominance rather than democratic principles and public accountability.

The political crisis that engulfed Rivers State between 2024 and 2026 represents a contemporary manifestation of this problem. The conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his political benefactor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, evolved beyond a personal disagreement into a broader struggle for political supremacy, control of state institutions, and liberation from perceived political domination. The crisis raised critical concerns about the extent to which godfatherism influences governance, undermines political autonomy, and threatens democratic stability in Nigeria. Yet, much of the existing literature has focused on the general effects of godfatherism on democracy, with limited scholarly attention devoted to examining the Rivers State experience as a struggle for political liberation from entrenched patron-client structures.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the nexus between power politics, godfatherism, and the struggle for political liberation in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026, with a view to understanding its implications for democratic governance and political development in Nigeria.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine power politics and the influence of godfatherism in Nigeria with particular focus on the struggle for liberation in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the nature and dynamics of power politics and godfatherism in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026.
2. Assess the extent to which the conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike reflects a struggle for political liberation from godfatherism in Rivers State.
3. Evaluate the implications of power politics and godfatherism on democratic governance, political stability, and institutional development in Rivers State.



2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Power- Politics

Power politics refers to a political situation in which individuals, groups, or institutions compete for the acquisition, retention, and exercise of power in order to influence decisions, control resources, and dominate political processes. It is founded on the belief that power is the ultimate objective of political activity and that political actors employ various strategies, alliances, negotiations, and sometimes conflicts to attain and preserve their positions within the political system. Power politics therefore emphasizes the struggle for influence and authority rather than the pursuit of collective societal interests (Morgenthau, 1948).

The concept is rooted in the broader notion of political power, which scholars regard as the ability of an individual or group to influence the behaviour, decisions, and actions of others. According to Dahl (1957), power exists when one actor is able to get another actor to do something that he or she would otherwise not have done. In political settings, this ability is often exercised through control of state institutions, political parties, economic resources, and social networks. Consequently, political actors continuously engage in strategic interactions aimed at maximizing their influence within the political system.

Power politics is often associated with elite competition and the struggle for political dominance. Pareto (1935) and Mosca (1939) argue that political power is usually concentrated in the hands of a small elite group that seeks to maintain control over political institutions and decision-making processes. These elites employ various mechanisms, including patronage, alliances, political bargaining, and influence networks, to sustain their dominance. As a result, politics frequently becomes a contest among competing elites seeking access to authority and state resources.

In democratic societies, power politics manifests through electoral competition, coalition building, lobbying, political negotiations, and policy influence. However, in developing democracies where institutions are relatively weak, power politics often extends beyond formal democratic procedures and assumes the form of patron-client relationships, political godfatherism, and elite manipulation of state institutions (Joseph, 1987). Under such circumstances, political contests are frequently driven by personal interests and struggles for control rather than ideological commitments or public welfare considerations.

In Nigeria, power politics has become a prominent feature of the political landscape since independence. Political actors often engage in intense competition for political offices because of the economic and social benefits associated with state power. The control of political structures, party machinery, public resources, and governmental institutions has frequently generated conflicts among political elites. This situation has contributed to political instability, factional disputes, electoral violence, and governance crises in various parts of the country (Ake, 1996).

The phenomenon of godfatherism represents one of the most visible expressions of power politics in Nigeria. Political godfathers often utilize their influence, resources, and networks to determine who occupies political offices and to maintain control over political processes. Such relationships



frequently lead to conflicts when political protégés seek independence from their sponsors after assuming office. The political crisis in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026 exemplifies how power politics can evolve into a struggle for political liberation when competing actors seek to assert authority and autonomy within the political system.

Within the context of this study, power politics refers to the competition for political influence, authority, control, and dominance among political actors in Rivers State. It encompasses the strategies, alliances, conflicts, and patronage networks employed by political elites in their quest to acquire, retain, and exercise political power. The concept provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of godfatherism and the struggle for political liberation that characterized the Rivers State political crisis between 2024 and 2026.

Godfatherism

Godfatherism is a political phenomenon characterized by a patron-client relationship in which a powerful political actor, commonly referred to as a "godfather," sponsors, influences, and facilitates the emergence of another individual, known as a "godson," into political office in exchange for loyalty, political allegiance, and access to state resources. The concept has become a significant feature of politics in many developing democracies, particularly in Nigeria, where informal political networks often exert considerable influence over formal democratic institutions (Albert, 2005).

The origin of godfatherism can be traced to the traditional notion of mentorship and guardianship, where influential individuals provide guidance and support to younger persons in their personal and professional development. In the political sphere, however, the concept has assumed a more complex dimension involving power, patronage, influence, and political control. According to Azeez (2009), godfatherism refers to a situation in which influential political elites determine who gets nominated, elected, or appointed into public office and subsequently seek to control the actions and decisions of such office holders. In this sense, political godfathers function as kingmakers who wield enormous influence over political processes and governance outcomes.

Scholars have argued that godfatherism thrives in political environments characterized by weak institutions, poverty, political patronage, and the personalization of power. Joseph (1987) observes that Nigeria's political system has historically been shaped by prebendal politics, where public offices are treated as opportunities for personal enrichment and patronage distribution. Under such conditions, political aspirants often depend on wealthy and influential patrons for financial support, electoral mobilization, and political protection. Consequently, elected officials may become more accountable to their political sponsors than to the electorate.

Godfatherism is often manifested through political sponsorship, control of party structures, manipulation of electoral processes, allocation of political appointments, and influence over public policy decisions. Political godfathers typically provide financial resources, campaign support, and strategic guidance to their protégés during elections. In return, they expect access to government resources, political appointments, contracts, and influence over governance decisions after electoral victory (Akinola, 2009). This arrangement frequently transforms public office into an instrument for servicing private political interests rather than advancing public welfare.



In Nigeria, godfatherism has become one of the most debated issues in democratic governance. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, several states have witnessed conflicts between political godfathers and their godsons. Notable examples include the political disputes between Chris Uba and Chris Ngige in Anambra State, Lamidi Adedibu and Rashidi Ladoja in Oyo State, and more recently, the conflict between Nyesom Ezenwo Wike and Siminalayi Fubara in Rivers State. These conflicts often arise when elected officials attempt to assert political independence or resist the influence of their sponsors, leading to political instability, governance crises, and institutional conflicts.

While some scholars argue that godfatherism can provide political mentorship and leadership continuity, the dominant view is that it undermines democratic governance. According to Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), godfatherism weakens political accountability, promotes corruption, encourages elite domination, and compromises the independence of elected officials. It also limits political competition by concentrating power in the hands of a few influential actors, thereby reducing opportunities for genuine democratic participation.

The Rivers State political crisis between 2024 and 2026 provides a contemporary illustration of the influence of godfatherism in Nigerian politics. The conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his political benefactor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, highlighted the tensions that often arise when a political godson seeks autonomy from the control of a political godfather. The crisis underscored the enduring relevance of godfatherism as a mechanism of political control and demonstrated how struggles over influence and authority can affect governance and political stability.

Within the context of this study, godfatherism refers to the exercise of political influence and control by powerful political actors over elected officials and political processes in order to advance personal, political, or group interests. It encompasses the patronage networks, power relations, and struggles for dominance that characterizes the relationship between political godfathers and their protégés in Nigeria. The concept is particularly relevant to understanding the political conflict and struggle for liberation that emerged in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026.

Politics of Godfatherism and the Struggle for Liberation in Rivers State from 2024 – 2026

Godfatherism has remained one of the most dominant features of political competition and governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The phenomenon describes a patron-client political relationship in which influential political actors sponsor candidates into public offices and subsequently seek to control governmental decisions and state resources. While godfatherism exists in various forms across Nigeria, Rivers State has emerged as one of the most prominent theatres of political patronage, elite dominance, and struggles for political autonomy. Studies have shown that godfatherism has consistently undermined democratic governance in Rivers State by fostering political dependency, weakening institutional accountability, and subordinating public interests to elite political interests.

The roots of contemporary godfatherism in Rivers State can be traced to the administration of Dr. Peter Odili (1999–2007). Although Odili's administration was widely credited with consolidating political structures within the state, scholars argue that it also laid the foundation for a highly centralized political network built around loyalty, patronage, and elite influence. Political conflicts reportedly emerged between Odili and influential political figures such as the late Marshal Harry, who



was initially regarded as one of his political benefactors. Following his consolidation of power, Odili developed an extensive political structure that would later influence leadership succession and political alignments within the state.

The succession of Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi as governor in 2007 further demonstrated the centrality of power politics in Rivers State. Amaechi's emergence was itself the product of intense political maneuvering and judicial intervention. During his administration, he established an extensive political network that dominated Rivers politics and significantly influenced political outcomes. However, his relationship with his political associates deteriorated over time, particularly with Nyesom Wike, who later emerged as a formidable political force in the state. The Amaechi-Wike rivalry gradually transformed Rivers politics into a contest among competing elite blocs struggling for control of political structures and state resources. This rivalry reinforced the perception that political power in Rivers State was increasingly determined by elite influence rather than purely democratic competition.

The emergence of Nyesom Wike as governor in 2015 marked another phase in the evolution of godfatherism in Rivers State. Through his control of party structures, grassroots mobilization networks, and governmental institutions, Wike established one of the most influential political machines in contemporary Nigerian politics. His administration successfully consolidated political authority and maintained significant influence over political recruitment and succession processes within the state. Consequently, the selection of Siminalayi Fubara as gubernatorial candidate in 2023 was widely interpreted as an extension of Wike's political influence and succession strategy. Many analysts viewed Fubara's emergence as a classic manifestation of political godfatherism in which a political protégé assumes office with the support of an influential political sponsor.

However, the political relationship between Wike and Fubara deteriorated shortly after the latter assumed office, culminating in one of the most significant political crises in Nigeria's recent democratic history. What initially appeared to be disagreements over appointments, resource allocation, and administrative control evolved into a broader struggle for political autonomy and institutional authority. The conflict polarized the Rivers State House of Assembly, generated impeachment threats, disrupted governance processes, and created significant political uncertainty within the state. Several commentators interpreted the crisis as a struggle for liberation by Governor Fubara from the influence of his political godfather.

Between 2024 and 2026, the Rivers crisis became a symbol of resistance against entrenched patron-client politics. Supporters of Fubara viewed his actions as an effort to assert constitutional authority and political independence, while supporters of Wike argued that political loyalty and respect for established political structures were necessary for stability. The crisis eventually escalated into a constitutional and governance challenge that attracted federal intervention and culminated in the declaration of emergency measures intended to restore political order in the state. The prolonged conflict exposed the fragility of democratic institutions when confronted with powerful informal political networks.

The implications of this struggle for democracy are profound. Democracy is founded on popular sovereignty, accountability, political equality, and the supremacy of constitutional institutions.



However, godfatherism undermines these principles by transferring political power from the electorate to a small group of political elites. When elected officials become accountable primarily to political sponsors rather than citizens, democratic representation is weakened and governance becomes personalized. Scholars have therefore argued that godfatherism constitutes a major obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria because it promotes elite domination and restricts political competition.

Similarly, the implications for good governance are significant. Good governance requires transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, and adherence to the rule of law. The Rivers State crisis demonstrated how power struggles between political godfathers and their protégés can disrupt governmental operations, delay policy implementation, create institutional paralysis, and divert attention from developmental priorities. Rather than focusing on service delivery and socioeconomic development, public institutions become preoccupied with political survival and elite contestation.

The Rivers State experience between 2024 and 2026 therefore represents more than a personal conflict between political actors; it reflects the broader struggle between democratic governance and entrenched patronage politics in Nigeria. It highlights the urgent need for stronger political institutions, internal party democracy, electoral reforms, and greater political accountability in order to reduce the influence of godfatherism and promote sustainable democratic governance. Ultimately, the struggle for liberation in Rivers State symbolizes a wider quest for political autonomy, institutional integrity, and democratic maturity within Nigeria's political system.

Nature and Dynamics of Power Politics and Godfatherism in Rivers State

The period between 2024 and 2026 witnessed one of the most intense manifestations of power politics and godfatherism in the political history of Rivers State. The crisis that emerged between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his political benefactor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, brought to the forefront the enduring influence of political patronage and elite control in Nigeria's democratic process. The conflict demonstrated that political power in Rivers State extends beyond formal constitutional authority and is often shaped by informal networks of influence, loyalty, and patron-client relationships.

One notable nature of power politics during this period was the struggle for control of political structures and state institutions. Following his election as governor in 2023, Fubara was widely perceived as the political protégé of Wike, whose political influence and organizational machinery significantly contributed to his emergence. However, shortly after assuming office, disagreements arose over appointments, control of government structures, allocation of political influence, and the management of state affairs. These disagreements gradually transformed into a broader contest for political supremacy and institutional control, reflecting a classic struggle between a political godfather and his godson.

Another significant dimension of the crisis was the personalization of political power. Rather than being driven primarily by ideological differences or policy disagreements, the conflict largely revolved around issues of political loyalty, influence, and authority. The struggle revealed how



political actors often prioritize personal political interests and control over institutional governance. This development is consistent with the observations of Joseph (1987), who argues that Nigerian politics is frequently characterized by prebendal tendencies in which political offices become instruments for maintaining patronage networks and elite dominance.

The dynamics of godfatherism were also evident in the mobilization of political allies and institutions to advance competing interests. Both camps sought support from political stakeholders, party structures, legislators, and other influential actors. The division within the Rivers State House of Assembly and the resulting legislative crisis reflected how political institutions can become arenas for elite contestation. Consequently, governance activities were affected as political attention shifted from developmental concerns to the struggle for political survival and dominance. Furthermore, the crisis revealed the tension between political sponsorship and political independence. While political godfathers often expect loyalty and continued influence after facilitating the emergence of their protégés, elected officials may seek autonomy in exercising constitutional powers. The Rivers State experience illustrated this contradiction, as Governor Fubara's perceived efforts to assert independence were interpreted by many observers as a struggle for political liberation from the influence of his political sponsor. This development transformed the conflict into a broader debate about the future of godfatherism and political accountability in Nigeria's democratic system.

The period also highlighted the persistence of elite politics in Rivers State. Despite the existence of democratic institutions, political outcomes continued to be heavily influenced by a small group of powerful actors. This situation reinforces the argument of elite theorists that political power is often concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who possess the resources, networks, and influence necessary to shape political decisions. Consequently, democratic institutions sometimes become secondary to informal political arrangements.

Overall, the nature and dynamics of power politics and godfatherism in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026 were characterized by struggles for political dominance, contests over institutional control, patron-client relationships, elite rivalry, and demands for political autonomy. The crisis not only exposed the resilience of godfatherism in Nigerian politics but also demonstrated the challenges confronting democratic governance where informal political structures compete with constitutional authority. The Rivers State experience therefore provides a significant case for understanding the interaction between power politics, political patronage, and democratic development in contemporary Nigeria.

The Weight of Conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike

The political conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike represents one of the most significant examples of the continuing influence of godfatherism in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Although political sponsorship has long been a feature of Nigerian politics, the Rivers State crisis provides a contemporary illustration of the tensions that often emerge when an elected political office holder seeks to exercise autonomy from the influence of a political benefactor. The nature and intensity of the conflict suggest that it was not merely a disagreement over governance issues but a broader struggle for political independence and control of state power.



Political analysts have argued that Governor Fubara's emergence in the 2023 governorship election was largely facilitated by the political structure, influence, and support network established by Wike during his tenure as governor of Rivers State. According to Omotola (2010), political godfathers often view the emergence of their protégés as an extension of their political authority and therefore expect continued loyalty and influence over governance decisions. Consequently, any attempt by a political protégé to assert independence is frequently perceived as a challenge to the authority of the godfather.

The Rivers State crisis reflected this pattern. Following his assumption of office, Governor Fubara increasingly demonstrated a willingness to exercise constitutional powers independently, particularly in matters relating to appointments, administrative control, and political decision-making. These actions generated resistance from political actors perceived to be loyal to Wike, leading to a series of confrontations involving the Rivers State House of Assembly, party structures, and other political stakeholders. According to Gambo (2021), conflicts between political godfathers and their protégés often arise when expectations of control and political obedience are challenged by the realities of governance and constitutional authority.

The struggle also reflected broader efforts to redefine political authority within the state. Scholars such as Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2009) contend that godfatherism persists because political power is often personalized and concentrated in the hands of influential individuals rather than institutions. In Rivers State, the conflict exposed the tension between personalized political influence and institutional governance. Governor Fubara's efforts to consolidate authority within the framework of his constitutional mandate were interpreted by many observers as an attempt to liberate the office of governor from external political control and patronage obligations.

Furthermore, the extent of the conflict demonstrates that the struggle transcended personal disagreements and assumed symbolic significance within Nigeria's democratic environment. Public support for Fubara among certain segments of the population was largely driven by perceptions that he was resisting political domination and seeking to promote administrative independence. In this regard, the crisis became a broader contest between the politics of patronage and the principles of democratic accountability. As argued by Suberu (2007), democratic governance is weakened when elected officials become accountable primarily to political patrons rather than the electorate.

The political developments that unfolded between 2024 and 2026 therefore suggest that the Rivers State crisis reflected a substantial struggle for liberation from godfatherism. The attempts by Governor Fubara to assert political autonomy, the resistance from entrenched political interests, and the institutional conflicts that followed all point to a contest over the ownership, control, and exercise of political power. While the extent of complete liberation from godfatherism remains debatable, the crisis undoubtedly challenged the traditional patron-client structure that has historically characterized politics in Rivers State.

Overall, the conflict between Fubara and Wike illustrates the continuing relevance of godfatherism in Nigerian politics while simultaneously demonstrating the growing demand for political independence, institutional autonomy, and democratic accountability. The Rivers State experience therefore represents a significant case study in understanding the evolving relationship between political sponsorship and political liberation within Nigeria's democratic process.



Implications of Power Politics and Godfatherism on Democratic Governance, Political Stability, and Institutional Development

Power politics and godfatherism have continued to exert significant influence on democratic governance and political development in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State. While political patronage and elite influence are not entirely unique to Rivers State, the intensity of political conflicts witnessed between 2024 and 2026 demonstrates the extent to which these phenomena can affect governance processes, institutional performance, and political stability. Scholars have argued that when political power is concentrated in the hands of influential individuals rather than democratic institutions, governance outcomes are often shaped by personal interests rather than the collective aspirations of citizens (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997).

One major implication of power politics and godfatherism is the erosion of democratic governance. Democracy is founded on the principles of popular sovereignty, accountability, political participation, and the rule of law. However, godfatherism tends to undermine these principles by transferring political authority from the electorate to a small group of influential political actors. According to Adejumobi (2000), political godfathers often determine electoral outcomes, influence public appointments, and shape policy decisions, thereby weakening the democratic process. In Rivers State, the prolonged conflict between political actors revealed how informal political networks can challenge the authority of constitutionally established institutions and limit the independence of elected officials.

Another significant implication is political instability. Political stability is essential for effective governance, economic development, and social cohesion. However, intense struggles for political dominance often generate uncertainty, division, and conflict within the political system. The political crisis in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026 resulted in legislative disputes, political polarization, and tensions among various stakeholders. Such developments created an atmosphere of uncertainty that diverted attention from governance and development priorities. As observed by Lindberg (2006), persistent political conflicts arising from elite competition often weaken democratic consolidation and increase the risk of governance crises.

Furthermore, power politics and godfatherism negatively affect institutional development. Institutions are expected to function independently, impartially, and in accordance with established laws and procedures. However, when political godfathers exercise excessive influence over governance structures, institutions often become instruments for advancing personal or factional interests. Hyden (2006) argues that the personalization of power weakens institutional capacity because decisions are frequently based on political loyalty rather than merit, competence, or legal procedures. In Rivers State, the crisis demonstrated how political interference can affect the functioning of legislative, executive, and party institutions, thereby reducing their effectiveness and credibility.

The phenomenon also undermines accountability and transparency in governance. Elected officials who owe their positions primarily to political sponsors may prioritize the interests of those sponsors over the needs of the electorate. This weakens democratic accountability and reduces citizens' confidence in government institutions. According to Diamond (1999), accountability is a fundamental requirement for democratic governance, and any system that promotes loyalty to individuals rather



than institutions poses a threat to democratic development. Consequently, godfatherism often encourages a culture of patronage and political dependency that hinders good governance.

In addition, power politics and godfatherism can obstruct policy continuity and developmental initiatives. Political conflicts frequently result in delays in decision-making, disruptions in government programmes, and the diversion of public resources toward political struggles. During the Rivers State crisis, considerable political energy and administrative attention were devoted to managing conflicts and maintaining political alliances rather than addressing pressing developmental challenges. This situation illustrates how elite rivalry can impede effective governance and slow institutional progress.

Nevertheless, the Rivers State experience also highlights the growing demand for political autonomy, institutional independence, and democratic accountability. The resistance to excessive political control by powerful patrons suggests an increasing awareness of the need to strengthen democratic institutions and reduce the influence of informal political structures. This development may contribute positively to democratic maturation if accompanied by institutional reforms and greater adherence to constitutional principles.

Conclusively, the implications of power politics and godfatherism in Rivers State are multifaceted. While they contribute to political instability, weaken democratic governance, and hinder institutional development, they have also generated debates about political independence, accountability, and the future of democratic practice in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires stronger democratic institutions, internal party democracy, respect for the rule of law, and greater political accountability to the electorate rather than to political patrons.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory

The Elite Theory constitutes the primary theoretical foundation of this study. The theory was developed by classical elite scholars such as Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), and later expanded by C. Wright Mills (1956). The theory posits that political power and decision-making in every society are concentrated in the hands of a relatively small group of influential individuals known as the elite. According to the theory, regardless of democratic structures and institutions, a minority group possessing political, economic, and social resources invariably dominates governance processes and determines the direction of public affairs.

Pareto (1935) argues that society is divided into two broad categories: the ruling elite and the non-elite. The ruling elite occupy strategic positions within political and economic institutions and exercise considerable influence over public decisions. Similarly, Mosca (1939) contends that political power is always controlled by an organized minority that governs the unorganized majority. This elite group maintains its dominance through control of resources, political structures, and strategic networks of influence.



Elite theorists further argue that political competition often occurs among members of the elite class rather than between elites and ordinary citizens. Consequently, governance processes are frequently shaped by elite interests, alliances, and rivalries. Mills (1956) observes that power is concentrated among political, economic, and bureaucratic elites who collectively influence major decisions within society.

The relevance of Elite Theory to the present study lies in its ability to explain the nature of power politics and godfatherism in Rivers State. The conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike can be understood as a struggle among political elites for influence, authority, and control of political structures. The theory explains how powerful political actors dominate political processes, determine leadership succession, and influence governance outcomes. It also provides insight into the struggle for political liberation by highlighting the tensions that arise when subordinate elites seek autonomy from dominant political actors. Therefore, Elite Theory offers a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of power, patronage, and political conflict that characterized Rivers State between 2024 and 2026.

Neopatrimonial Theory

The supporting theory for this study is Neopatrimonial Theory. The concept of neopatrimonialism gained prominence through the works of Eisenstadt (1973), Bratton and van de Walle (1997), and Médard (1982). The theory describes a political system in which formal state institutions coexist with informal networks of personal loyalty, patronage, and clientelism. In such systems, public authority is often exercised through personal relationships rather than through impersonal legal-rational procedures.

Neopatrimonialism is characterized by the personalization of power, patron-client relationships, political patronage, and the use of public resources to maintain political support. According to Bratton and van de Walle (1997), political leaders in neopatrimonial systems frequently distribute state resources, appointments, contracts, and political favours to loyal supporters in exchange for allegiance and continued political support. Consequently, formal institutions often become subordinate to informal networks of influence and personal loyalty.

The theory further argues that political authority in many developing countries is sustained through patronage structures in which powerful individuals act as patrons while less powerful actors function as clients. These relationships are usually based on reciprocal obligations, with patrons providing protection, resources, and opportunities in return for loyalty and obedience. As a result, governance processes become personalized and heavily dependent on the interests of influential political actors.

The relevance of Neopatrimonial Theory to this study stems from its capacity to explain the operation of godfatherism in Rivers State politics. The relationship between political godfathers and their protégés reflects a classic patron-client arrangement in which political support and sponsorship are exchanged for loyalty and influence. The conflict between Wike and Fubara illustrates the tensions that emerge when a political client seeks autonomy from an established patron. The theory therefore provides a framework for understanding how informal political networks, patronage systems, and personal loyalties shaped the struggle for political liberation in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026.



The combination of Elite Theory and Neopatrimonial Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. Elite Theory explains how political power is concentrated among influential actors and how competition among elites shapes political outcomes. It helps in understanding the struggle for political dominance and control that characterized the Rivers State political crisis.

On the other hand, Neopatrimonial Theory explains the patron-client relationships and informal political arrangements that sustain godfatherism within the political system. It provides insight into how political sponsorship, loyalty, patronage, and personal influence affect governance and political behaviour.

Together, the two theories offer a robust analytical framework for examining power politics, the influence of godfatherism, and the struggle for political liberation in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026. They explain both the elite competition for political control and the patronage structures that underpin political relationships in contemporary Nigerian politics.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine power politics and the influence of godfatherism in Nigeria, with particular focus on the struggle for liberation in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026. Data for the study were obtained from secondary sources, including textbooks, journal articles, newspaper publications, government documents, official reports, and other relevant scholarly materials. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which enabled the researcher to identify, interpret, and explain themes relating to power politics, godfatherism, political liberation, democratic governance, and political stability in Rivers State.

4.0. DISCOURSES

The Nature and Dynamics of Power Politics and Godfatherism in Rivers State

In elucidating the objective one, this study found that power politics and godfatherism remained dominant features of Rivers State politics between 2024 and 2026. The political crisis between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike was characterized by intense struggles for political control, influence, and dominance over state institutions. The findings revealed that patron-client relationships, elite rivalry, and competing political interests significantly shaped governance during the period. The study further showed that the conflict reflected the continued influence of political godfathers in determining political outcomes and exercising control over elected officials in Rivers State.

The extent to which the Conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike Reflects a Struggle for Political Liberation from Godfatherism in Rivers State

In assessing the research objective two, this study established that the conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike largely reflected a struggle for political liberation from the influence of godfatherism in Rivers State. The findings revealed that Governor Fubara's efforts to exercise constitutional authority and political independence were perceived as attempts to free his administration from external political control. The study further showed that resistance from



entrenched political interests intensified the crisis and deepened political divisions within the state. Overall, the conflict underscored the tension between political sponsorship and the quest for autonomy in democratic governance.

The Implications of Power Politics and Godfatherism on Democratic Governance, Political Stability, and Institutional Development in Rivers State

In context of objective three, the study found that power politics and godfatherism had significant negative implications for democratic governance, political stability, and institutional development in Rivers State. The findings revealed that the prolonged political conflict weakened democratic accountability, created instability within government institutions, and disrupted effective governance. The study also showed that political rivalry and elite domination undermined the independence and efficiency of key state institutions. Overall, power politics and godfatherism contributed to political uncertainty and hindered institutional growth and democratic consolidation in Rivers State.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study examined power politics and the influence of godfatherism in Nigeria, with particular focus on the struggle for liberation in Rivers State between 2024 and 2026. The study concludes that the political conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Ezenwo Wike reflects the enduring influence of godfatherism and elite domination in Nigeria's democratic process. It further concludes that power politics and patron-client relationships undermine democratic governance, political stability, and institutional development by promoting political dependency and elite rivalry. The study therefore emphasizes the need for stronger democratic institutions, political accountability, and constitutional governance to reduce the influence of godfatherism and enhance good governance in Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

5.2. Recommendations

1. The government and relevant electoral institutions should strengthen democratic institutions and electoral processes to ensure that political leadership emerges through popular choice rather than the influence of political godfathers and patronage networks.
2. Political parties should promote internal party democracy by ensuring transparent candidate selection processes and reducing the excessive influence of powerful individuals in determining political outcomes.
3. Elected public office holders should be encouraged to uphold constitutional principles, political accountability, and the rule of law in order to safeguard governance from undue interference by political patrons and elite interests.
4. There is a need for continuous political education and civic enlightenment programmes to increase public awareness of the dangers of godfatherism and encourage greater citizen participation in democratic governance.
5. The government should implement institutional reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and the independence of state institutions, thereby reducing elite domination and strengthening democratic governance and political stability in Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole.



Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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