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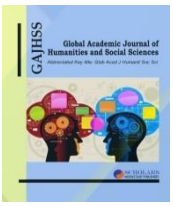

ISSN:2706-901X (P)
ISSN:2707-2576 (O)

Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Available online at https://www.gajrc.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2026.v08i02.003

Original Research Article

Politics, Development and Political Captivity in Nigeria: A Study of Rivers State

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Article History
Received: 23.01.2026
Accepted: 17.03.2026
Published: 25.03.2026

Abstract: Nigeria's developmental problems are intimately tied to the kind of political system it operates under which in most cases is marked with patronage networks, godfatherism, elite domination and political violence. Such dynamics, akin to political captivation- control of public institutions and governance by individuals or groups, serves private interests rather than the public interest. Perhaps mothering captures the workings of political captivity and its impact on development like the case of Rivers State, Nigeria's third most capitalized states after Lagos and Abuja. Despite the state generating significant revenue from petroleum resources, persistent governance crises, political instability and socio-economic inequality continue to plague the state. Here, we explore the link between political captivity and improvement of the state, examining how the activities of elite involvement into politics affect democratic values to undermine sustainable development in the state. Qualitative content analysis was adopted for the study. Findings of this study includes: that the political overshadowing by elites reveals that resources meant sustainable development of the state are misappropriated, the activities of the elites has also intensifies upheaval in the Niger Delta region creating serious insecurity challenges. The study recommended among others that democratic institutions should be strengthened, concerted reforms to take place in the electoral laws and body to checkmate corruption by the political players and lastly, the economy to be diversified to curb high contestations in politics.

Keywords: Politics, development, political captivity.

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INTRODUCTION

When in any human society, community or country, we witness growth in the economy, or transformation in their social life, observe institutional effectiveness, and a positive change in the living standard of the citizens, there is development in that society. In developing countries today, especially in Nigeria, dysfunctional political systems and the overshadowing influence of the elite have contributed majorly in hindering the outcome of development for the people. A nation experiences political captivity when her political key players – actors overshadow government institutions/apparatus and send their stooges to occupy such offices for personal or fractional benefits rather than the welfare of the general public.

Since 1999, patronage politics, corruption, and of course electoral violence and other vices has affected Nigeria's nascent democratic experiment. To maintain power in many states of Nigeria, political office seekers/political players have relied on the network of their loyalists, financial patronage and sometimes deploying their own militia groups for elite domination of political institutions. When this becomes the practice, it undermines political nuances such as democratic accountability as well as

weakening of developmental role of the state. In Rivers State, one of the striving states in the Niger Delta region, the challenge of political captivity is more pronounced especially due to its strategic position in oil resources, which heats up the political competition for political elites.

It is without gainsaying that Rivers State contributes immensely to Nigeria's oil production and national revenue, but with little or no signs to show for it in many of her communities that have not been able to share in her wealth and blessings, still experiencing underdevelopment, environmental pollution and degradation, and social/political instability, etc. The witness of political fight for power and office among the elites, having so high patronage politics with violent contestation for power, yielded governance full of crises in such a manner that it impede any developmental initiatives so as to satisfy political 'godfather'.

Development that is targeted toward the improvement of the quality of life of citizens, particularly focusing on how their socio-economic status can be transformed has remained a significant goal of modern states or society. The understanding of development in general term is vast including when there is improved welfare of the people, institutional capacity is witnessed, social progress is present, political stability is enjoyed, and there is growth in the economy. Scholars in their right have argued that development is not just increase in the economy or when the gross domestic product (GDP) is high, but that the experience of development in the state includes having improved governance, serving infrastructures, sustained educational systems, affordable healthcare system and social justice (Todaro & Smith, 2020). For a state to achieve a sustainable development there must be an effective governance pattern which must be accountable as a political institution of the people.

In many countries today, developmental goals are challenged by the kind of political structures kept in play by political godfathers; top of this list is political captivity. This is the state where political apparatus of the State/Nation and its governance pattern witness the domination and complete overshadowing influence and control of some very powerful persons (individuals), political elites, maintaining patronage networks. In this situation, policy decisions and allocation of resources for the interest of the public are influenced more by the political elites instead of serving common societal needs of the people. When political captivity appears, it becomes evident with nomenclatures like the operation of political clientalism, electoral manipulation, patronage politics and the elite holding the power to state wealth – resources.

The nexus between development and politics has been engaged debate wise by researchers in Nigeria. Nigeria as a nation has experienced more of competitive politics in 1999 that they returned back democracy, which is championed by patron-client affiliations and overshadowing influence of elites throughout their political systems. A major feature of Nigerian politics is the political godfatherism, a situation where political players with much affluence and power select out their candidat5es for public office, so that they can control state wealth. Researchers have identified this approach to have rooted d3eply into Nigeria's nascent democracy, causing it to overlook accountability in democratic practices resulting into lacking in good governance (Oghuvbu, 2023).

In any system where godfatherism, be it politically or otherwise is practiced with patronage networks, it creates serious implications for good governance and development of the society. However, when there is competition existing within the political elites all because they desire to be in control of state political apparatus, using their most loyal and preferred persons; it makes individuals with genuine zeal in politics to be denied of their franchise, this in turn makes the institution weak and unreliable. Having displayed this, it may become obvious that conducting elections will be less of policy issues and more of elites fighting violently with their militia groups so they can gain access to the wealth that belongs to all (Nkwede, Ibeogu, & Nwankwo, 2014).

In the case of the federating union of Nigeria, the pattern of political captivity are more obvious to the observers at the second tier of government – the state level, where the government in power display much influence overwhelmingly over state resources maintaining their own state structure administratively. This happens within several of the federating units using the networks of patronage, and making it possible through choosing their leaders; reveal their policy drive and how resources are allocated to each region. This pattern most often than none creates a shift in the focus of governance from the public, meeting their needs and pursuing the needs of political godfathers. Political captivity denies government to be development oriented in line with their policies.

Rivers State which is found within the Niger Delta region happens to be one of the states in the Nigerian federating units where volatile politics is in display by political players. The state is strategically positioned because of its vast oil resource and role in Nigeria's political economy as it contributes to National revenue. In spite of the economic relevance of Rivers Sate, there has continued to be a noticeable

political upheaval and elite clashing while seeking dominance and causing general crises in governance. Researchers have continued to identify that political godfatherism, patronage networks and heated elite competition have characterized the state making governance outcome obvious (Nwambuko, Nwobi, & Omiunu, 2024)

Political terrain in Rivers State is one that can easily be identified with frequent heated fight between political players seeking overall control of state apparatus. In fact, political institutions are now targeted for personal gain instead of serving the public. Development plans that should serve the people have become instruments of political calculations for the clientele political godfathers.

In addition, the frequent political rivalry/contestation in Rivers State over her oil wealth has generated serious conflicts that in great measures disrupted development plans and initiatives. Rivers State has witnessed discontinuity of government policy and instability in administrative structure as a result of the political crises, continued struggle among different factions of political leaders and electoral disputes. The above political situation is capable of making potential investors withdraw their investment; it weakens political institutions and retards the growth at which development would be recorded.

In the light of the above realities, investigating on the nexus between political captivity and development cannot be over emphasized for better comprehension of those contending issues around governance in Rivers State and indeed Nigeria at large. Examining how the overshadowing influence of the elite and patronage politics brings about weak political apparatus can affect developmental results, this research has added to the body of knowledge on how good governance pattern can lead to sustainable development in any oil-rich society.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is greatly endowed with both the natural and human resources in such a way that charting the course of economic transformation and sustainable development will not be a problem to achieve. Notwithstanding however, the frequent and repeated events of political upheavals that pose challenges to development, poverty on the increase, lack of job, infrastructures that can stand the test of time and weak government institutions have continued to bedevil the nation.

One major challenge of governance is Nigeria has been the fight to be in control of political seats by a few individuals with affluence and power – the political elites. Having a political godfather and running a patronage networks have taken a major role in Nigeria's political life. To be declared a winner today in Nigerian election, political office seekers rely heavily on their financiers and elites backing. On assumption of office, political officials become responsible to their sponsors instead of the electorate. This pattern of politics exonerates the officials from being held accountable by the electorates and incapacitates/impede development plans.

Researches on Nigerian political trends have revealed that aggressive contestations by political elites in other to be in charge of the government has led to electoral manipulations of results, and an undue influence on the citizens in undermining their constitutional rights. This process nullifies elections which in turn fail to reflect the wishes of the voters and makes the authority of democratic apparatus weak (Nkwede *et al*., 2014).

More so, the overshadowing influence of political godfathers operating patronage networks is linked to the presence and prevalence of corruption, embezzlement of public fund over public welfare. It has been argued by researchers that political struggle among elites to grab power using their 'godson' has regularly disrupted democracy threatening it consolidation.

Political tussle and elite dominance in politics is more at the state level where governors/political godfathers exercise great powers over public funds, and running their own political structures. Tussle for power is more intense in Rivers State due to its strategic economic power, and more because of high stakes in revenues and developmental projects.

In spite of the fact that Rivers State contributes heavily to national revenue, it has continued to have serious development issues. In many of the communities that make up the state, there is the absence of infrastructures, joblessness, social and economic inequality among the citizens and visible environmental degradation. These social amenities are lacking amidst the wealth of the state through oil revenues and allocations.

Both scholars and experts in policy matters have raised a heart pearsing concern that the longer we have conflicts and overshadowing influence of political class – the elites in Rivers State; it will stand against the development of the state. Instability in the administration of the state, political tussles between the legislative cycles and crises are bound to happen when there exists political fight between elite factions, killing their drive focus for development.

The presence of political patronage networks works against how public resources are allocated for public benefit and focuses on satisfying the few political elites. Hence, talking of developing the society through public welfare services becomes a mirage.

Although it can be identified that there are challenges, more evidence of scholarship analysis is needed on political captivity and its outcome on Nigeria development wise. The practice of political godfatherism in Nigeria has been studies on with little aspect of the overshadowing influence of the elite and how they affect development in Rivers State.

The current study is targeted at identifying the nexus between political captivity and the rate with which development have been recorded. Particularly, it is focused on knowing how political patronage networks, elite overwhelming influence, and the weakness of government apparatus – institutions affect the rate of development in Rivers State. A better understanding of this pattern of politics helps in knowing how reforms in the state policies brings about accountability, empowering democracy which ultimately promotes sustainable development in Rivers State particularly and Nigeria at large.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Captivity and Governance

Political captivity means a situation where institutions of state powers are taken over by few affluent persons to maintain their relevance in society and control public fund. Developing democracies of the world reveal this practice by the appearance of patronage politics or networks, clientele political relationships and elitism structure of governance.

Clientelism refers to obtaining supporting hold for governance and exchanging it with material gains like job opportunity, contracts, and any other rewards financially or otherwise Kitschelt & Wilkinson (2007) asserts that clientelistic pattern of government makes democracy vulnerable and removes being accountable since political officials serve their sponsors instead of the state.

In Nigeria, clientele politics has been revealed as the major pattern of political relationship and power tussle. Public office seekers leverage more on those sponsoring them financially so that they can win elections. Upon assumption of office, their preference goes to their sponsors – political godfathers/allies, before the state at large – the electorates. Studying this pattern of politics has revealed that it encourages corrupt practices and misappropriation of public purse. Nigeria has been identified as a nation operating a political style called 'prebendal politics,' meaning that public institutions of power are used for the disbursement of state wealth to those that rendered one help or the other during the electioneering campaigns.

Political Godfatherism in Nigeria

One of the patterns of political practices in Nigeria to reveal that political captivity is an established political form within the country is through the existence of political godfatherism. This means a system of politics where persons with great influence and wealth sponsor political aspirants so that on their assumption of office, controls them as well as state resources and policies. Albert (2005), opined that the appearance of political godfatherism in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic, especially from the state level of politics, where political elites fight to be in control of the state fund through their selected officials.

Study by Nkwede, Ibeogu, & Nwankwo (2014) reveal godfatherism pattern of politics results to political unsteadiness due to the fight between sponsors and their 'godsons'. As a result of their fight, governance is unstable, the legislative circle experiences disagreement and implementing policy for development becomes a mirage. More so, the operation of godfatherism makes democracy impossible and holding political officials responsible becomes impossible since they are targeted at pleasing their political sponsors.

Development Challenges in the Niger Delta

Niger Delta region is known for lack of social amenities even though the region is responsible for the majority of oil revenues in Nigeria. The host communities of the region still languish in abject poverty, and there is serious environmental pollution and degradation coupled with lack of basic infrastructures. The challenges in the Niger Delta region can be linked to the inabilities of public officials to give good governance and the elites taken over the instrumentalities of government (Watts, 2004). The wealth of the state through their oil revenue has been identified as the source of the political contestations with so much intensity which leads to corruption and embezzlement instead of having government of inclusivity leading to improved standard of living.

Ecological dilapidation coming from oil discovery is a major source of social and economic hardship in Niger Delta. The traditional means of livelihood of the people within the region has been altered greatly by the presence of pipeline vandalization, continues gas lettering and general pollution making farming and fishing impossible as means of survival for the people (IUNEP, 2011).

These adjustments in the proper form of governance has made it possible for elites with wealth and power to intensively contest for dominance over state power which manifests as political captivity at long run.

Conceptual Framework

Political Captivity

Political captivity describes a state where governance is taken over by few individuals interested in politics otherwise called godfathers, they are in charge of political means of producing lows that will favour them. Under this condition, officials elected or selected as the case may be and become accountable to their godfathers instead of the state.

Godfatherism is a terminology used in Nigeria to identify persons who invest in politics through sponsoring candidates for government public offices. Officials on assumption of office show their allegiance by releasing material benefits to thse3s sponsors, giving them appointment, and contracts. Political clientelism destabilizes qualified means of carrying out governance and makes democratic apparatus of no consequence (Arulogun, 2023).

Political captivity is revealed when the following pattern is present in the state:

(a) Patronage networks is a system where people invest so that when their preferred candidates assumes office state resources will be in their control, they also structures the administrative from of the state (Scott, 1972; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

(b) Electoral manipulation is that behaviour by political key players to ensure that election and indeed the entire procedure of electing a person into office is maneuvered for their benefit killing the spirit of fairness and transparency. This manipulation may happen before, during and even when elections processes are done. Research has described electoral maneuvering to be more frequent when democracy is in practice in a state. However, it works in favour of the ruling power irrespective of what election outcome may be (Schedler, 2002). In the same vein, Birch (2011) opines that electoral manipulation works against the values of democracy including in elections, making voters voice and choice not to stand, creating fraudulent results.

(c) Elite capture of public resources happens when persons that have political, economic and social powers redirects state funds meant for the public to serve their personal gains. This is possible because the government has been weakened. The plans to reach the masses becomes overturned coursing inequality to widen, public service denied and accountability a mirage (Li, 2025; Wang, 2024). Study has revealed that elite capture of power is reoccurring and more rampant in the third tier of government, during community improvement activities. This political pattern allows elites to have overshadowing influence over state funds for themselves and their supporters instead of the general populace. (World Bank, 2022).

(d) Use of violence and intimidation are among other vices employed before, during and even after elections in the state. They are employed to create intimidation, fear and harassment forcefully on the opponents. Its applicability is targeted toward the electorates in general but most specifically voters, election workers and political aspirants (Bekoe *et al*., 2017). Furthermore, application of threats of harm, harassing people during political campaigns and destruction of political buildings, and materials results into lacks of interest to vote, and aspirants thinking of withdrawal from political race. Research has revealed situations where the electorates, aspirants and sometimes political godfathers were under serious conditions of threats, constantly harassed by political players leaving them to live under fear of their lives. This activity happens especially when campaigns are ongoing (ISD & H&CC, 2024). These are considered effective tools when intense contestations take place among those competing for government public officers.

(e) Institutional manipulation has been discoursed variously by writers and authors. It has been described as brainstorming with election officials, fixing when it can be held, how independent in authority is the election body, who qualified to contest, etc. All these are geared towards supporting the victory of the ruling political party or ensuring that incumbency is returned. Institutional manipulation affects altering electioneering laws, the institution and rules to the advantage of the incumbents. Political players do all they can to win political officers for their preferred supporters (Higashijima *et al*., 2024; V-Dem Project, 2016). The operation of these political patterns makes governance not to be formidable standing against the progress or improvement of the people's standard of living.

Development and Governance

Development or improving the life of the population needs the mechanisms of government to show openness and inclusivity in its operations. Nevertheless, when the government apparatus are taken over by few individuals with political willpower, policies that will bring about the improvement of the peoples standard of living will be altered so that political elite's welfare will be taken care of by their political 'protégés.' Patronage networks is the avenue used today in developing democracies to settle political support teams which undermines plans toward the improvement of both the society and the individuals that make up the population (Omobowale & Olutayo, 2011).

The resultant effect of this is that investing in essential areas or sectors like infrastructural development, education, healthcare delivery, ensuring that the ecological system is protected will be given a second place so that political protégés will still remain relevant.

Political History and Governance in Rivers State

Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance over its territories in 1999, volatile and intense contestation politics has been happening in Rivers State. The importance of the state among the federating units of Nigeria is obvious from her wealth of oil revenue both to the state and federal government. Reports from Human Rights Watch describes political activities in Rivers State 'as a kind of war,' where political players organize special militias to push back other contestants using the instruments of intimidation so that election results can be manipulated to their win.

Militants and cult gangs were deployed by influential political elites in the 2003 elections to ensure victory to their political party. These later escalated criminality activities all over the Niger Delta region (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Due to the continued use of this pattern of politics, holding political officials responsible for the betterment of the society is now subverted for the satisfaction of political godfathers.

Manifestations of Political Captivity in Rivers State

Godfatherism and Elite Control

One particular evident line of politics in Rivers State happens to be that it is influenced by very powerful individuals who invest into politics to control, decide who rules the state and give directions on how state plans for improved living will be executed. The actual intensions of the political actors – godfathers, are to control government treasures through receiving the loyalty of government officials whom they sponsored. This pattern of politics eventually does not preference the government to provide good governance with inclusivity for better developmental strides.

Patronage networks are the system that allows some persons with both economic and political powers to exercise these over the government officials on assumption of office to gain control of the state funds and direct policies (Ameh, 2025). Corruption is well rooted today in Nigerian politics majorly because of the operations of elitism and clientele politics in Nigeria.

Electoral Violence and Political Militias

Employing the use of violence in Rivers State politics cannot be overemphasized. Political elites use militias that are armed and political thuggery to push back other aspirants, destroy their campaign facilities and outright over-inflating of votes that were already casted during elections to their party's advantage. Study show that these militia groups came into being by political actors, who after elections metermorphosised into full militant gang attaching and vandalizing pipelines carrying the resources of the nation. Today, kits activities cannot be denied in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. (Human Right Watch, 2008).

Militancy or militant groups has multiplied today in Nigeria, creating serious security challenges, making potential investors into the country and Niger Delta in particular to be discouraged. This ultimately works against plans for development.

Institutional Weakness and Political Crisis

Not having a stable and smooth running government apparatus has influenced political captivity as is the case in Rivers State. A typical example is the incessant political fight for power that has existed for some time now in Rivers State between the sitting governor and majority of the state legislatures. By this continues power tussle, good governance that will lead to sustainable development will become an illusion.

Rivers State slummed into an un-envisaged political fight in 2025, which resulted in the declaration of emergency rule that lasted for about six mothers by the federal government because the conflict degenerated into vanderlization of public properties like oil infrastructures, etc. The political crisis gathered momentum to the extent that factions and powerful political players and followers called for the sitting governor to be impeached. This is another point that unhealthy political contestations can indeed mare governance in general. When this happens target is diverted from the people's welfare, revealing absolute failure of the system.

Implications for Development

Poor Infrastructure Development

Where a few individuals overwhelmingly influence political institutions, the distribution of public funds will be affected. Instead of attacking infrastructural development, monies for that purpose will be diverted for personal aggrandizement. Notwithstanding the enormity of her wealth from oil revenues, majority of the communities in Rivers State are still today without good roads, health services, and good portable drinking water and steady power supply.

Persistent Poverty and Inequality

The Nigerian society has continued to witness inequality and chronic poverty since the elites has remained the centre of both political and economic power. The few individuals with power continue to gain economically from the state fund. However, communities at large whose oil reserve is being explored go into abject poverty and their ecological system polluted and continues to suffer degradation on a high scale.

Weak Democratic Institutions

When there exist the pattern of politics where few individuals grab power and controls government apparatus, democratic principles become weakened. When political captivity becomes obvious in the state, the masses show apathy in their government.

Strategies for Overcoming Political Captivity

Intentional efforts should be made toward ensuring that the tenets of democracy are maintained as to reduce political captivity in the state. The pattern of conducting elections must be strengthened; the judiciary must be made to stand independently so they can deliver good and endearing judgments. A general over hauling elections will be put in place to earn the trust of the people, bringing corruption rate to the barest minimum.

The role of civil society must not be in doubt. There will be checks and balances by these civil organizations so that political players can be open in their dealings and governance processes. When the general population becomes involved and participates in governance the opportunity for the elite to rule over the political world will be reduced and monitored.

The state should plan on diversifying economically. The much reliance on oil for revenues by the state will change when there is investments into other sectors, this can reduce the political intensity and contestations for power because of the state wealth through oil. It can create other opportunities for greater development in the state.

Theoretical Framework

To clearly state the nexus between dev elopement and political captivity in a state will need theoretical bases that can portray their relationship in an understandable manner. Therefore, this study makes use of Elite Theory and Political Economy Theory as the main thrust of its analysis. Using these theories will reveal the extent to which power relation and control reacts when there is resources in the state and how it also mitigates development plans.

Elite Theory

It is a general opinion of then elite theorists that in many societies where political power resides with the elites – few individuals with wealth and affluence, they control the economic, political, and the apparatus of governance. Going by the stance of theorists like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, human society is in two major groups: such as the ruling elites and the masses. The elites overshadow governance making policies that will protect and preserve their interests (Mosca, 1939).

Mills, on the other hand has further elaborated on this by saying that the political, economic and military elites make up what he called 'power elite' which exist to be in charge of major political halls of the society (Mills, 1956). When this system exists, the democratic pillars exist for formality since they are greatly influenced by political players for their benefit.

For the Nigerian state, elite theory brings to bear the operations of godfatherism in politics, a situation that allows few individuals stand by their preferred candidates thereby dictating what policies must be implemented and the political structure that will run for the state. Researches hold that these political elites use patronage networks and sponsorships to hold sway state apparatus (Albert, 2005).

Rivers State in recent times especially, has showcased intense contestation and political tussle by elites to consistently gain control over political institutions. Key political players with the economic and political powers often have dominated the elections, dictating policy tones and making democratic institutions weak, creating apathy in the general masses concerning their participation in governance.

Political Economy Theory

Political economy theory investigates the nexus that exist between political power and

economic resource and how it helps in deciding the rate of development in a particular place. It further elaborates that for there to be development in a place or state, both the political and economic processes must be involved revealing the political institutions structure of operations. Research posits that sharing state resources and the particular political frameworks run by it contributes immensely to the improvement of standard of living of the people (Leftwich, 2000). But in situations where the political apparatus remains in the hands of elites, state funds therefore will be distributed to favour small few (elites) rather than pursue public goal.

The political economy approach is a fitting tool of analysis for the Niger Delta region going by its oil revenue status. Because of this the intensity of political contestation by the elites to be in charge of the state is high. This event has been richly talked about in literature concerning the 'resource curse' which opines that there are challenges in governance which centre on the issues of high level of corruption and incessant political tussle and unsteadiness in the region (Ross, 2012).

A classic state of example of this pattern is Rivers State. This is one of the major contributors of oil revenue in Nigeria and generates a high amount of wealth through this source. In spite of this status, high political tussle which has taken place in the state has made development and political stability impossible as elite's intense political contestations for dominance. Both the elite theory and political economy theory are veritable tools of analysis for better comprehension of the functionality of political captivity when it appears and how it has affected politics and subsequent development in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study takes up a qualitative investigation to explain the nexus between political captivity and the rate of development in Rivers State. For a study of this nature, qualitative approach becomes appropriate to use and analyze very complicating political patterns that quantitative measurement will not reveal correctly and comprehensively. The research made use of case study design with its focus on Rivers State. This type of study creates room for deep search in political and institutional operations within a specific area (Yin, 2018). The study gathered its sources from secondary data, like journal articles, reports issued by governments, policy papers, books and publications of international bodies since their information are reliable sources describing true situations of politics and governance in Rivers State. Qualitative content analysis was adopted to look into literature and documents to point out themes appearing and reappearing in relations to political captivity, elite overshadowing and stoppages in development rate.

Analysis: Political Captivity and Development in Rivers State

Elite Competition and Instability in Governance

The history of political activities in Rivers State has been that6 of intensified contestations between political elites who are seeking to have dominance and control over state funds. This power tussles are often made visible through the constant battle – political wise where sitting and ex-governors, the acclaimed godfathers and even legislative members are involved. This political upheaval can overturn democratic processes and hinder plans to improve a place and its population.

Involvement of Militias and Electoral Violence

Rivers State today as politically tensed up happens to be contributory to the part political militias' play especially during elections. Armed militias are reported as the activities of political elites to cause their co-contestants so that they can withdraw from the race or through interference in electoral results to their benefits. Human Right Watch (2007) has revealed that the elites employs the services of militias when elections are conducted leading to serious cases of loss of life and properties in the region. The expansion of militia gangs today has consequent outcome in the insecurity and lack of adequate development of the Niger Delta region since potential companies and investors may be threatened by their nefarious activities and unstable political mechanisms.

Political Patronage Networks and Resource Control Conflict

The political tussle for who controls what in Rivers State and indeed the Niger Delta region has made politics so intensified among the contesting political parties. Being the party in power creates openings to gaining contracts, political appointments and having resources that could have cause improvement in society. As a result, elites put first on their agenda to maintain and retain political power instead of practicing inclusivity and good governance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research focus on the nexus that exist between the nomenclatures of political captivity and developmental strives in Rivers State. The political overshadowing by elites reveals how resources are allocated and the outcome of development in both social and economic areas. Good and inclusive governance is exchanged for selfish satisfaction of political godfathers.

Because political sponsors (godfathers) are allowed the space to run the policies of the state, the

resources meant for state development will be diverted hence distorting plans to improve the area. Carrying out work of development will be by the consideration of the elites, when and how they want such to happen instead of by the necessary policies in line with the needs of the communities.

In addition, the unstable nature of government powers and authority as a result of political tussle majorly contributed by the activities of the elites distorts plans made in the policies to improve the standard of living of the larger population. Therefore, these happenings further support the idea that good and inclusive governance is key to having sustainable development in the state and Nigeria at large.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been put forward to this study:

1. Strengthening Democratic Institutions: The high political penetration of the elites is as a result of weak political institutions operational in the state. To curb and forestall the incessant occurrence of these elites that control government apparatus, it has been argued by scholars that electoral body in the state and the judicial system should be given autonomous powers to run both electoral and political instructions for better results and stable governance (Vallbe, 2026; Ogundare & Yakubu, 2025; Ogayi & Onyebuchi, 2025).

2. Electoral Reforms: Where political elites dominants affairs of governance in the state, it is pertinent that reforms should take place immediately and properly too. Such reforms however sh9uod include the areas of elections and other very important arms of government. Studies have suggested that improving the electoral body of the state will bring about openness in electoral operations, eliminating the reoccurrence of political violence and thugery, and encourage the masses to take part in their governance processes especially in choosing their leaders (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2011; & Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014).

3. Anti-Corruption Checks: When the political environment of a state has been captured by the elites, there is the tendency that the system will experience corruption and serious embezzlement on a high scale. To forestall this from happening frantic efforts will be made to guard against misappropriation of public fund by the ruling class. Research is of the opinion that working policies should be put in place to prevent political elites from using public funds for their self aggrandizement and serve the population to bring about improved living and sustainable development (Rose-Ackerman & Palika, 2016). This can be a better way to checkmate the elite and their operations of political patronage networks.

4. Diversifying the Economy: The much political conflicts today in Rivers State particularly and in other regions of the federation can be attributed to the much reliance on the fact that there are oil revenues accruing to the state. Hence, authors argue that this dependence on crude heightens tussle for power and intensifies contestations among political players so that state funds can be controlled by them (Ross, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The tussle for political prominence and dominance in Rivers State is a typical revelation that political captivity by elites can distort plans to improve living in the state as it is in other oil producing states of the federation. Elitism, clientele politics, chaotic elections and unstable government institutions result in serious challenges in general governance and destabilize development plans.

Attending to these pressing issues require concerted efforts to bring about intentional changes to enable government agencies to be held responsible thereby eliminating to the barest minimum clientele activities. When a state embarks on effective overhauling of the system, sustainable development and an enduring system of governance will be maintained in this case in Rivers State and in Nigeria at large.

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