Leadership Succession Crises and Conflict of Interest in a Democratic State: A study of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Leadership succession crises and conflicts of interest are critical challenges facing democratic governance in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State. These challenges often manifest as political instability, reduced public trust, and disruptions in governance, driven by the influence of political godfatherism, electoral irregularities, and the absence of transparent succession frameworks. The study investigates how leadership succession crises influence governance stability, evaluates the role of political godfatherism in leadership transitions, and examines the effects of conflicts of interest on policy continuity and public service delivery in Rivers State. It further proposes institutional reforms to mitigate these challenges and promote democratic governance. The study adopts a descriptive survey research design, focusing on Rivers West Senatorial District, with a projected population of approximately 2,366,158 people. A

multi-stage sampling technique was employed, resulting in a sample size of 400 respondents. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, while secondary data was drawn from government reports and academic literature. The research instruments were validated by political science experts and achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.7 using Cronbach's alpha. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data provided contextual insights. Findings revealed that leadership succession crises, fueled by political godfatherism and electoral irregularities, significantly undermine governance stability and public trust. The study concludes that addressing these issues requires institutional reforms, such as enhancing electoral transparency, strengthening judicial independence, and promoting internal party democracy. Recommendations include leadership training programs, conflict resolution mechanisms, and policies to mitigate conflicts of interest.

Keywords: Leadership succession, godfatherism, electoral irregularities, democratic governance.

1. Introduction

The political landscape in Nigeria is increasingly defined by leadership succession crises and conflicts of interest, primarily driven by the influence of political godfathers and the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for managing succession. This dynamic has created an environment where political power is concentrated among a few elite figures, whose rivalry has shaped the state's political trajectory over the past decade. The persistence of these conflicts undermines democratic governance, as leaders prioritize personal ambitions and alliances over public service, leading to governance inefficiencies and a lack of accountability (Egobueze, 2016). A significant aspect of this issue is the practice of godfatherism, where powerful figures influence the selection of successors to retain control over state affairs even after leaving office.

The recent tensions between Wike and his chosen successor, Sim Fubara, illustrate the challenges that arise when successors attempt to assert independence, often leading to conflicts with their sponsors. This situation reflects a broader national

trend, where godfathers expect loyalty from their protégés, limiting the autonomy of elected officials and undermining democratic principles. The lack of internal democracy within political parties exacerbates this problem, as candidates are often selected based on loyalty rather than merit, reducing the electorate's ability to choose leaders who genuinely represent their interests (Dode & Ita, 2020). Furthermore, the recurrent succession crises in Rivers State highlight the limitations of Nigeria's electoral system, which is often plagued by irregularities and manipulation. Elections in Rivers State have been frequently influenced by political elites who use their resources to sway outcomes in their favor. This lack of transparency and fairness undermines public trust in the electoral process and perpetuates a cycle where political power remains concentrated among a select few. The dominance of political elites over electoral processes limits the ability of citizens to influence leadership succession, effectively marginalizing the electorate in decisions that affect governance and policy direction (Goodwin-Gill, 2016).

The instability resulting from succession crises has significant implications for governance in Rivers State, as political leaders are often more focused on maintaining alliances and managing conflicts than on delivering essential services. This environment of factionalism and elite dominance stifles development, as resources are diverted to maintain political power rather than address the needs of the populace. The feud between Wike and Amaechi, along with the recent fallout between Wike and Fubara, exemplifies the challenges of achieving democratic governance in a state where succession processes are heavily influenced by personal and factional interests rather than democratic principles (Anifowose, 2016). The failure of political institutions to manage succession and conflicts of interest in Rivers State points to a broader issue within Nigeria's political system, where the lack of institutionalized frameworks for leadership transitions and the prevalence of godfatherism hinder democratic consolidation. Although, similar studies like Agudiegwu, Ngwu, & Amulu (2021) examined the political framework that constitutionally shares power among the diverse regional and ethnic groupings and promote mutual trust and national integration in Nigeria. Egobueze, (2017) examined conflict management in River state: periscoping the involvement of the Rivers State House of Assembly. Joab-Peterside (2020) contends that violence no matter its dimensions in the 2019 general elections in Rivers State,

posed fundamental credibility problems because the elections are flawed, competitions unfair because of the use of militarized forces, executive power, and compromised electoral institutions. But little or no study has been able to address issues that require reforms that enhance internal party democracy, regulate the influence of political elites, and promote transparency in electoral processes. Without these reforms, the challenges of leadership succession and conflict of interest in Rivers State are likely to persist, undermining governance and limiting the potential for sustainable democratic development. Hence, this study aims to fill these existing gaps by investigating leadership succession crises and conflict of interest in democratic state: a study of Rivers state, Nigeria.

The general objective of this research is to investigate leadership succession crises and conflict of interest in democratic state: a study of Rivers state, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

i. analyze the effect of leadership succession crises on governance stability in Rivers State
ii. examine the influence of political godfatherism on leadership succession and governance in Rivers State
iii. investigate the effects of electoral irregularities on public trust in leadership succession processes in Rivers State
iv. evaluate the effect of conflict of interest on policy continuity and public service delivery in Rivers State
v. propose institutional reforms that can promote democratic leadership succession and reduce conflicts of interest in Rivers State

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Leadership Succession

The term succession means different things to different scholars of various disciplines. Literary it means a change in structure, in which one person after another succeeds in a position, title or throne. It is a process of bringing about changes in the sphere of a phenomenon by which a person becomes entitled to the position. Banjo (2018) says succession means the process of changing leadership. Olaniyi and Umar (2024) on their part viewed succession as the orderly means of

transferring political power from one group to another and such orderliness process is determined by the level of maturity of the country and its citizens. He further buttressed the point that there is need for strategic and rational thinking especially on succession issues, and its management from every sphere of life, be it traditional, social, political, economic, corporate and otherwise. This will guarantee a stable polity, policy and restore confidence of the government and the country (Ijim-Agbor, 2004). Musa (2022) view succession as a theoretical and empirical transformation of the totality of social, economic, cultural and political values, experience and processes under social change from the inception of colonial contact to present day democratic governance.

The Effect of Leadership Succession Crises on Governance Stability

Leadership succession is a critical component of governance, shaping the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of institutions and nations. Succession crises occur when disputes, power struggles, or uncertainties arise in the transition of leadership, leading to potential instability. These crises are prevalent in both political and organizational contexts, with profound implications for governance stability. Leadership succession is often a litmus test for the maturity of governance systems. A seamless transition of power signifies institutional resilience and adherence to democratic principles or organizational protocols (Adegboye, 2020). However, when succession crises emerge, they expose systemic weaknesses, such as the absence of succession planning, entrenched interests, or the failure to institutionalize governance processes. Leadership succession crises manifest in various forms, including disputes over eligibility, manipulation of succession procedures, or outright rejection of successors.

Politically, these crises undermine state legitimacy, erode public trust in institutions, and weaken the rule of law. For instance, prolonged succession disputes can delegitimize governments, leading to widespread dissent and disobedience. Economically, they deter investment and disrupt economic activities, as investors and stakeholders perceive instability as a risk factor (Asobie, 2021). In organizations, succession crises lead to inefficiencies, decreased productivity, and a loss of competitive advantage. Leadership succession crises also have socio-cultural dimensions, particularly in traditional and communal governance

systems. In such contexts, disputes over succession often reflect broader societal tensions, such as ethnic, religious, or generational divides. These disputes can escalate into larger conflicts, further destabilizing governance systems. For example, in Nigeria, succession crises in traditional leadership structures often spill over into broader communal conflicts, disrupting local governance and social harmony (Eze, 2020).

Godfatherism

The concept of godfatherism encompasses various elements such as intermediation, mentorship, benevolence, support, and sponsorship. In the realm of politics, it embodies the idea that certain individuals hold considerable sway, enabling them to dictate the allocation of party tickets and influence electoral victories (Chukwuemeka, Oji, and Chukwurah, 2023; Ita and Edet, 2018). As per Ayoade (2016), godfathers wield significant influence within political parties, often dominating the nomination process due to their control over the party machinery. These influential figures are considered political giants within their constituencies, sought after by both parties and candidates alike for their ability to mobilize political support. Godfatherism, thus conceptualized, revolves around the belief that certain individuals possess the power to single-handedly determine party nominations and electoral outcomes. Bassey and Enetak (2018) have elucidated a conceptualization of godfatherism that captures the influence and power wielded by politically significant individuals in shaping candidate selection for elections and influencing election outcomes. In their opinion, godfathers demonstrate significant political mobility and possess the ability to direct political support toward specific parties or candidates through their influential endorsements. Those involved in this practice are known as godfathers, while those who benefit from their support are referred to as godsons, highlighting the complex relationship between influential figures and their beneficiaries in the political sphere. As described by Chukwuemeka et al. (2023), godfathers represent a coalition of powerful socio-economic and political elites bound by a common value system operating within a structured framework. These coalitions often feature godfathers who exert control over the collective entity, like a well-organized mafia. These influential figures, known for their formidable sway, dictate the who, what, when, and how of political and bureaucratic appointments. In contemporary Nigeria,

many godfathers have adopted tactics reminiscent of the mafia, employing violent schemes, aggressive politicking, and manipulative strategies to further their interests. In this pursuit, they often adhere to Machiavelli's famous adage, the end justifies the means.

Influence of Political Godfatherism on Leadership Succession and Governance

In Nigeria's fourth republic, the emergence of godfatherism posed great threat not only to good governance but also the socio-economic stability of democratic governance. Perhaps one of the most disturbing and damaging influence of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic was in domain of making nonsense of a truly free, fair and credible electoral process in which the electorates by right are expected to freely elect people of their choice into public office to represent their interests. Indeed, the privilege of electing people of their choice into public office was denied given the situation in which godfathers foisted candidates of their preference on the generality of the people (Ndubuisi 2021). This is to say the least very inimical to the tenets of democratic rule. When public office holders would not be accountable to the people, who at any rate did not count in their elections into public office. Invariably, the loyalty of such public office holders would be tilted towards their godfathers, and this negates one of the critical attributes of democracy which is responsive and transparent government. This scenario is also inimical to good governance and political stability which are predicated on the rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of public business.

Electoral Irregularities

Electoral irregularities have always been a thorn in the flesh of credible election management. They represent flawed or manipulated elections that deflate voter participation (Birch, Daxecker & Höglund, 2020). As a complex concept that represents a subtle deviation from established electoral procedures, electoral irregularities manifest in various forms as electoral malpractice, manipulation, and even government interference to increase one's political mileage. It can begin with flawed voter registration through electoral malpractice and progress into lifetaking thuggery and violence. In Nigerian, elections are undermined by electoral irregularities that triggered a series of opposition protests and resulted in the

demand for election cancellation and removal of some key INEC officers (EU Election Observation Mission [EOM], 2015). Electoral irregularities run at variance with the global standards on credible elections captured in Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government (the United Nations, 1948).

The Effects of Electoral Irregularities on Public Trust in Leadership Succession Processes

Electoral irregularities, which encompass practices such as vote-buying, ballot stuffing, manipulation of results, voter intimidation, and disenfranchisement, pose a significant threat to democratic governance. They undermine the integrity of elections, erode public trust in leadership succession processes, and destabilize political systems. Elections are a cornerstone of democracy, providing citizens with the opportunity to choose their leaders through a transparent and credible process. When electoral processes are free, fair, and transparent, they enhance public confidence in governance and leadership succession. However, irregularities compromise this trust, casting doubt on the legitimacy of elected leaders. The perception that elections are manipulated or unfair discourages public participation in future elections and weakens the social contract between citizens and the state (Ajayi, 2021). Electoral irregularities primarily affect public trust by undermining the principle of fairness. When citizens perceive that elections are rigged, their belief in the credibility of the system diminishes.

The Effect of Conflict of Interest on Policy Continuity and Public Service Delivery

Conflict of interest arises when an individual or organization is involved in multiple interests, one of which could compromise their decision-making or actions in fulfilling official duties. In governance and public administration, conflicts of interest are pervasive and often undermine policy continuity and the effective delivery of public services. This conceptual review explores how conflicts of interest affect governance processes, focusing on their impact on policy continuity and public service delivery. Policy continuity is essential for ensuring sustainable governance. It facilitates the long-term implementation of programs and policies, allowing governments to achieve developmental goals.

Institutional Reforms that can Promote Democratic Leadership Succession and Reduce Conflicts of Interest

Democratic leadership succession is vital for sustainable governance, stability, and public trust in political systems. However, challenges such as conflicts of interest, political patronage, and lack of transparency often undermine the democratic process. Institutional reforms are critical to promoting democratic leadership succession while addressing conflicts of interest that hinder governance integrity. A fundamental reform for promoting democratic leadership succession is the establishment of independent and autonomous electoral commissions. Electoral commissions play a critical role in ensuring free, fair, and credible elections. By operating independently of political influence, such bodies can oversee transparent electoral processes that foster confidence in leadership succession. For example, adopting biometric voter registration, digital vote counting, and transparent result collation can reduce electoral malpractice, which often fuels conflicts and distrust (Okonjo & Adewale, 2021). Another reform is the introduction of robust legal frameworks to regulate political activities and address conflicts of interest. Laws governing campaign financing, asset declarations, and lobbying must be implemented to ensure accountability and transparency in political processes. For instance, campaign finance reforms that cap donations and disclose sources of funding can reduce undue influence by special interest groups, thereby promoting impartial leadership succession (Nnadi & Oyetunde, 2020).

Literature Review

Leadership succession crises and conflicts of interest have posed significant challenges in democratic states, particularly in Nigeria. These issues arise from systemic weaknesses, political manipulation, and institutional inefficiencies, which hinder the smooth transition of power and threaten democratic stability. Expanding the discourse on these issues requires an exploration of constitutional gaps, electoral processes, political godfathers, weak institutions, and governance frameworks. Agudiegwu, Ngwu, and Amulu (2021) argue that the lack of constitutional provisions for rotational power-sharing among Nigeria's six geopolitical zones perpetuates succession crises. The absence of such frameworks fosters distrust among political actors, creating unhealthy competition that often leads to electoral violence. In a similar vein, Omotosho and Ogunsanwo (2015)

emphasize the importance of constitutional reforms to address perceived marginalization and promote inclusivity in leadership transitions. These scholars suggest that adopting a more structured approach to power-sharing could enhance national cohesion and mitigate succession conflicts.

Electoral violence, a recurring issue in Nigeria, further complicates leadership transitions. Joab-Peterside (2020) highlights the role of violence as a tool for political control, often leading to voter disenfranchisement and loss of confidence in electoral processes. Falade and Adeyemi (2016) point to the monetization of elections and manipulation of security forces as major contributors to electoral violence, which undermines the legitimacy of leadership succession. Obiagu and Abada (2020) add that government interference in the electoral process, particularly through Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), exacerbates these challenges by fostering irregularities and eroding public trust. The pervasive influence of political godfathers further undermines democratic principles in Nigeria. Chukwuemeka, Oji, and Chukwurah (2023) describe godfathers as power brokers who prioritize personal interests over national development, imposing candidates who may lack competence and legitimacy. This practice destabilizes political institutions and fuels internal party crises. Ita, Udoaka, and Ekpo (2024) elaborate on how godfathers affect internal party democracy, particularly within Nigeria's two dominant parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-Progressives Congress (APC). They argue that godfathers manipulate party structures, creating divisions that hinder effective governance and leadership transitions.

Theoretical Review

This study adopts three theoretical frameworks: Elite Theory, Conflict Theory, and System Theory, to understand the dynamics of leadership succession crises and conflicts of interest in democratic states.

Elite Theory

Elite theory examines how power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals or institutions in society, often referred to as the "elite." Originating in the works of Vilfredo Pareto (1935) and Gaetano Mosca (1939), elite theory

challenges the notion of egalitarianism in political systems by asserting that even in democratic states, decision-making and power distribution are controlled by an elite minority. Pareto introduced the concept of the "circulation of elites," where ruling groups are periodically replaced by new elites from the same social class. Mosca, on the other hand, emphasized the inherent dominance of a minority class in any society, which he termed the "ruling class." In democratic states, elite theory critically evaluates the tension between the ideals of democracy—universal participation, equality, and accountability—and the reality of power being monopolized by an exclusive group. Political elites often establish mechanisms, such as control over political parties, campaign financing, and access to media, to preserve their dominance. These mechanisms allow them to manipulate electoral processes, influence public opinion, and marginalize potential challengers.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, developed by Karl Marx in the 19th century, posits that society is fundamentally characterized by ongoing conflicts between competing groups over scarce resources such as wealth, power, and social status. At its core, the theory asserts that structural inequalities within society perpetuate exploitation and domination by powerful groups, leading to resistance and conflict from marginalized groups (Marx & Engels, 1848). While originally focused on class struggles, modern adaptations of conflict theory have been applied to various domains, including race, gender, and political systems. Conflict theorists argue that power dynamics are central to understanding societal relationships and that dominant groups use their power to maintain their privileges at the expense of others. In political systems, this manifests as competition for control over state resources, decision-making authority, and leadership positions. Leadership succession processes often become arenas for intense power struggles, as competing factions vie for dominance. Conflict theory highlights how structural inequalities—such as unequal access to resources, political marginalization, and systemic corruption—fuel leadership crises and conflicts of interest. The theory also emphasizes the role of ideology in legitimizing power imbalances, with dominant groups promoting narratives that justify their control while suppressing dissenting voices.

System Theory

System theory originated in biological sciences in the mid-20th century, with key contributions from Ludwig Bertalanffy and Humberto Maturana. It views society as a complex system composed of interconnected and interdependent components that function together to maintain stability and achieve common goals (Bertalanffy, 1951; Maturana, 1970). In political science, David Easton (1953) adapted system theory to analyze governance as a holistic structure. According to Easton, political systems operate through a cyclical process involving input (demands and support from the public), processes (policy making and implementation), and output (policies and decisions). System theory posits that any disruption in one part of the system affects the entire system, emphasizing the need for balance, coordination, and adaptability. It also highlights the importance of feedback loops, which allow systems to adjust to changing conditions and maintain equilibrium. In governance, this means that leadership succession processes must be carefully managed to prevent instability and ensure the system's continuity.

3. **Methodology**

The study employs a descriptive survey design with a mixed-method approach to examine leadership succession crises and conflicts of interest in Rivers West Senatorial District, Rivers State. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected to explore governance and policy continuity comprehensively. Rivers West, comprising eight Local Government Areas with an estimated population of 2,366,158, serves as the study area. The population includes public officials, political party members, civil society representatives, and residents affected by governance challenges. A total of 400 respondents is selected using a multi-stage sampling technique, with stakeholders chosen through purposive sampling and residents through simple random sampling. Data collection is primarily conducted through a structured questionnaire, supplemented by in-depth interviews and secondary data from literature and reports. The questionnaire addresses issues such as leadership succession crises, political godfatherism, electoral irregularities, conflicts of interest, and institutional reforms, using a four-point Likert scale. Content validity is ensured by expert review, and reliability is tested using Cronbach's alpha with a threshold of 0.7. Data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative findings, while qualitative insights are

analyzed thematically. Ethical principles are upheld by ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and obtaining ethical clearance. While the study focuses on Rivers West, limiting generalizability, anonymity and trust-building mitigate challenges associated with the politically sensitive nature of the topic.

4. **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Table 1: Analysis of Distributed Questionnaires

Total Questionnaire	400
Void and unanswered Questionnaire	7
Valid Questionnaire	393

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2024

4.1. Socio-Demographic information on the Respondents

Table 4.2: Socio-Demographic information on the Respondents

VARIABLES		**FREQUENCY**	**PERCENTAGE**	**Cumulative %**
Gender	Male	212	53.9	53.9
	Female	181	46.1	100
Age	Below 30	107	27.2	27.2
	31-40	78	19.8	47
	41-50	96	24.5	71.5
	Above 51	112	28.5	100
Marital Status:	Single	140	35.5	35.5
	Married	129	32.9	66.4
	Divorced	124	31.6	100
Educational Level:	Secondary	129	32.7	32.7
	Tertiary	133	33.9	66.6
	Postgraduate	131	33.4	100
Religion	Christian	109	27.4	27.4
	Muslim	94	24	51.4
	Traditionalist	95	24.3	75.7
	Others	95	24.3	100

Sources: Researcher's Computation, 2024

The socio-demographic breakdown of the respondents shows a balanced gender distribution, with 53.9% male and 46.1% female, ensuring diverse viewpoints on societal perceptions of children born outside wedlock. Age-wise, the largest group is over 51 years (28.5%), followed by those under 30 years (27.2%), reflecting a mix of generational perspectives. A significant portion is single (35.5%), with married (32.9%) and divorced (31.6%) individuals also represented, providing varied insights based on marital status. Educationally, most respondents have secondary (32.7%), tertiary (33.9%), or postgraduate education (33.4%), indicating a well-educated sample likely to hold progressive views on social issues. Religious affiliations are evenly distributed among Christians (27.4%), Muslims (24%), Traditionalists (24.3%), and others (24.3%), highlighting the role of religion in shaping attitudes toward children born outside wedlock, given varying doctrinal and cultural influences.

4.2 Analysis of Research Questions

Question one: In what ways do leadership succession crises influence governance stability?

Table 4.3: Responses of participants based on research question one

Respondents Responses	SA (5)	A (4)	UD (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	SD	Decision
Political instability in Rivers State is often linked to unresolved leadership succession conflicts.	88	78	75	73	79	3.41	1.13	Agreed
Political parties in Rivers State often fail to promote stable leadership transitions	86	69	72	80	86	3.23	1.19	Agreed
Governance in Rivers State is negatively impacted by the absence of clear succession plans	95	79	68	75	76	3.44	1.10	Agreed
Clear leadership succession plans can improve	101	64	74	91	63	3.43	1.12	Agreed

governance stability in Rivers State								
Political rivalry during leadership transitions hinders effective governance in Rivers State	83	65	87	95	63	**3.25**	**1.17**	Agreed
Leadership crises disrupt long-term policy implementation in Rivers State	99	77	72	78	67	3.42	1.11	Agreed
Governance stability in Rivers State depends on resolving leadership succession disputes	78	74	84	88	69	3.21	1.20	Agreed
CRITERION MEAN: 2.5								

SOURCE: Researchers' Computation, 2024

The responses presented in Table 4.3 revealed a significant consensus among respondents regarding the negative impact of leadership succession crises on governance stability in Rivers State. Across all related statements, mean scores consistently exceeded the criterion mean of 2.5, highlighting general agreement. Respondents strongly agreed that unresolved leadership succession conflicts lead to political instability (M = 3.41) and that political parties' failure to manage stable transitions exacerbates governance challenges (M = 3.23). This aligns with the work of Adegboye and Aluko (2021), who posited that unresolved leadership transitions create power vacuums, disrupt administrative processes, and fuel political instability in Nigeria. Similarly, Oluwole (2020) found that the lack of clear succession plans contributes to leadership struggles, reducing governance effectiveness. However, these findings slightly contrast with Akinwale (2019), who argued that some leadership transitions in Nigeria are stabilized by informal agreements within political elites. The consensus that clears leadership succession plans could improve governance stability (M = 3.43) aligns with global governance models, such as those proposed by Huntington (1991), which emphasize the

necessity of transparent frameworks for ensuring stability during political transitions. In Rivers State, the absence of these plans amplifies the challenges, leading to governance inconsistencies and long-term policy disruptions (M = 3.42). This strongly underscores the need for institutionalizing leadership frameworks to enhance stability, consistent with findings by Ugochukwu (2022).

Question two: What is the influence of political godfatherism on leadership succession and governance?

Table 4.4: Responses of participants based on research question two

Respondents Responses	**SA (5)**	**A (4)**	**UD (3)**	**D (2)**	**SD (1)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
Leaders in Rivers State are accountable to the people.	87	82	56	94	74	3.34	1.15	Agreed
Resolving external influences can improve governance in Rivers State.	78	81	85	77	72	3.24	1.18	Agreed
Leaders in Rivers State are chosen based on merit.	73	84	80	73	83	3.23	1.19	Agreed
Governance in Rivers State is unstable.	94	73	82	66	78	3.38	1.13	Agreed
External influences cause conflict among leaders in Rivers State.	87	80	73	77	76	**3.33**	**1.15**	Agreed
Unpopular leaders are often imposed on Rivers State.	100	92	73	69	59	3.53	1.06	Agreed
External influences should be addressed to improve leadership succession in Rivers State.	90	93	67	72	71	3.42	1.11	Agreed
CRITERION MEAN: 2.5								

SOURCE: Researchers' Computation, 2024

Table 4.4 above found that political godfatherism significantly influences leadership succession and governance in Rivers State. The mean score for the statement that political godfatherism often results in the imposition of unpopular

leaders was the highest (M = 3.53), highlighting its detrimental effect. This aligns with Adebayo (2018), who argued that godfatherism in Nigeria undermines democratic principles by prioritizing personal interests over public welfare. Participants also agreed that governance instability arises from godfatherism, with a mean score of 3.38. This supports findings by Eze (2020), who noted that godfatherism fosters factionalism and power struggles among political elites, ultimately destabilizing governance. The statement that external influences, such as political godfathers, disrupt leadership succession received a mean score of 3.42. This reflects the broader assertion by Ogundipe and Akinyemi (2022) that external interference in leadership transitions weakens democratic institutions and reduces public trust in governance. However, while existing literature often portrays godfatherism as entirely negative, some studies, like Adejumo (2017), suggest that godfathers can occasionally ensure political stability by mediating disputes among political actors. The findings in this study, however, lean more heavily toward the negative consequences, particularly regarding the erosion of merit-based leadership (M = 3.23).

Question three: What are the effects of electoral irregularities on public trust in leadership succession processes?

Table 4.5: Responses of participants based on research question three

Respondents Responses	**SA (5)**	**A (4)**	**UD (3)**	**D (2)**	**SD (1)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
Public trust in governance improves with free and fair elections	92	68	78	79	76	3.39	1.12	Agreed
Transparent elections can reduce leadership succession disputes	85	72	73	91	72	3.24	1.18	Agreed
Public trust in leadership is eroded by a lack of transparency in the electoral process	76	91	78	80	68	3.31	1.15	Agreed

Electoral malpractices harm the credibility of leadership transitions in Rivers State	93	85	76	71	68	3.44	1.10	Agreed
Election rigging negatively affects public confidence in governance	86	95	69	70	73	**3.40**	**1.11**	Agreed
Electoral irregularities in Rivers State hinder democratic leadership succession	105	79	70	84	55	3.51	1.06	Agreed
Electoral irregularities increase political apathy among citizens	84	94	80	75	60	3.36	1.14	Agreed
CRITERION MEAN: 2.5								

SOURCE: Researchers' Computation, 2024

Table 4.5 above underscored the detrimental impact of electoral irregularities on public trust in leadership succession. Participants strongly agreed that transparent elections reduce succession disputes (M = 3.24) and improve public trust in governance (M = 3.39). This aligns with Diamond (2015), who argued that free and fair elections are fundamental to democracy and critical to building public confidence in leadership transitions. The statement that electoral malpractices harm the credibility of leadership transitions received the highest mean score in this category (M = 3.44), echoing the findings of Akpan and Okon (2021), who noted that vote-buying, rigging, and other irregularities erode trust in electoral processes, thereby weakening governance. Similarly, respondents agreed that electoral irregularities increase political apathy (M = 3.36), aligning with Oluwafemi (2020), who linked voter disenfranchisement to recurring electoral fraud in Nigeria. These findings contrast slightly with international studies, such as those by Norris (2017), which highlight instances where electoral reforms have successfully restored public trust, suggesting that while electoral irregularities can have devastating effects, they are not irreversible.

Question four: What is the effect of conflict of interest on policy continuity and public service delivery?

Table 4.6: Responses of participants based on research question four

Respondents Responses	SA (5)	A (4)	UD (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	SD	Decision
Leadership stability is essential for effective public service delivery	95	84	75	68	71	3.43	1.10	Agreed
Clear succession processes reduce policy discontinuity	82	92	91	66	62	3.37	1.13	Agreed
Policy inconsistencies are caused by conflicts among political elites	85	85	76	75	72	3.33	1.15	Agreed
The absence of policy continuity reduces the effectiveness of governance	79	86	80	79	69	3.29	1.16	Agreed
Conflicts of interest among leaders negatively affect public service delivery	89	91	68	74	71	**3.39**	**1.12**	Agreed
Conflicts of interest among political leaders disrupt policy continuity	89	93	71	79	61	3.41	1.11	Agreed
Resolving conflicts of interest among leaders is critical to sustaining good governance	91	88	76	77	61	3.42	1.10	Agreed
Conflict resolution mechanisms are needed to improve policy continuity	95	84	75	68	71	3.43	1.10	Agreed
CRITERION MEAN: 2.5								

SOURCE: Researchers' Computation, 2024

The responses in Table 4.6 demonstrated that conflicts of interest among political leaders significantly disrupt policy continuity and public service delivery in Rivers State. Respondents strongly agreed that leadership stability is essential for effective

public service delivery (M = 3.43) and that clear succession processes reduce policy discontinuity (M = 3.37). This aligns with the work of Nwafor and Chukwuma (2019), who emphasized that leadership conflicts often result in policy inconsistencies and gaps in service delivery. The high mean score for the statement that conflicts of interest among leaders disrupt policy continuity (M = 3.41) supports the findings of Adedoyin et al. (2021), who noted that political rivalries often lead to the abandonment of beneficial policies, undermining governance effectiveness. Additionally, respondents agreed that resolving conflicts of interest is critical to sustaining good governance (M = 3.42), consistent with Uche (2020), who highlighted the importance of conflict resolution mechanisms in fostering collaborative governance. However, these findings contrast with studies in more developed democracies, such as Halligan (2018), which suggest that institutional checks and balances can mitigate the negative effects of leadership conflicts. In Rivers State, the absence of such mechanisms exacerbates governance challenges, highlighting the need for targeted reforms.

Question five: What are the institutional reforms that can promote democratic leadership succession and reduce conflicts of interest?

Table 4.7: Responses of participants based on research question five

Respondents Responses	SA (5)	A (4)	UD (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	SD	Decision
Stronger judiciary systems can mitigate conflicts during leadership transitions	111	74	68	83	57	3.52	1.05	Agreed
Institutional reforms will improve policy continuity and public service delivery	79	89	81	77	67	3.34	1.14	Agreed
Implementing anti-corruption measures can enhance governance stability	87	87	83	66	70	3.38	1.12	Agreed
Electoral reforms are essential to restore public trust in leadership succession	102	71	76	82	62	3.45	1.09	Agreed

Strengthening democratic institutions can reduce conflicts of interest	102	72	74	82	63	**3.44**	**1.10**	Agreed
Institutional reforms are necessary to promote transparent leadership succession	97	81	64	89	62	3.41	1.11	Agreed
Reforms in leadership succession will strengthen public trust in democratic governance	81	87	74	68	83	3.33	1.15	Agreed
Institutionalizing leadership training programs can reduce succession crises	111	74	68	83	57	3.52	1.05	Agreed
CRITERION MEAN: 2.5								

SOURCE: Researchers' Computation, 2024

The above Table 4.7 identified institutional reforms as critical to promoting democratic leadership succession and reducing conflicts of interest. Respondents strongly agreed that strengthening the judiciary can mitigate conflicts during leadership transitions (M = 3.52), echoing the findings of Ikpe (2021), who emphasized the role of judicial independence in resolving electoral disputes and ensuring smooth transitions. Participants also agreed that electoral reforms are essential to restoring public trust in leadership succession (M = 3.45) and that anti-corruption measures can enhance governance stability (M = 3.38). These findings align with Omotola (2020), who argued that tackling systemic corruption is a prerequisite for stabilizing governance in Nigeria. The high mean score for the statement that leadership training programs can reduce succession crises (M = 3.52) highlights the importance of capacity-building initiatives, consistent with the recommendations of Aina (2019). However, the study's findings contrast slightly with research from advanced democracies, such as Patterson (2017), which suggests that institutional reforms alone are insufficient without cultural shifts that prioritize transparency and accountability.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that leadership succession crises, if unresolved, lead to governance instability, reduced public trust, and service inefficiencies. Political godfatherism exacerbates these challenges by prioritizing loyalty over competence, distorting governance outcomes. Electoral irregularities further erode public confidence in democratic processes, perpetuating cycles of political apathy and instability. Addressing these issues requires institutional reforms, transparent leadership frameworks, and stakeholder collaboration.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered.

1. Strengthen the independence of electoral commissions to ensure transparent leadership transitions.
2. Enforce legal frameworks to regulate campaign financing and curb electoral malpractice.
3. Institutionalize leadership training programs to prepare potential successors for governance roles.
4. Promote internal party democracy to minimize the influence of political godfatherism.
5. Introduce policies to address conflicts of interest in public service delivery.

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