

GODFATHERISM AND 2019 ALL PROGRESSIVES CONGRESS (APC) PRIMARY ELECTION CRISES IN ZAMFARA STATE

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Abstract

Since the attainment of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country has experienced military rule for nearly three decades. In 1999, Nigeria returned to democratic rule, full of hope and aspirations that the system will guarantee political equality, human rights and rule of law among others. However, one of the challenges that bedeviled the country's democratic consolidation is political godfatherism that enables the elites to manipulate and disenfranchise citizens, particularly at the party level. In Nigeria, godfatherism has become a political instrument to an extent that having access to political office requires not only votes but a political godfather. Zamfara State is not an exception. Since 1999, political godfathers in the state ensure that the political leadership revolves around few individuals who are perceived to be loyalists to godfathers. The gross violation of APC's party constitution with regards to the party's primary election perpetuated by the godfathers of the ruling APC in the state led to the nullifications of the electoral victory and subsequently the loss of all political offices won by the ruling APC in the state. Thus, this study assesses the impact of godfatherism on internal party politics in Nigeria, using the 2019 Zamfara APC primary election crisis as a case study. The study relies on both primary and secondary sources of data and argues that political godfathers in their quest for power have no regard for party constitution and rules guiding the conduct of party primaries. Therefore, the study recommends that, internal democracy must be restored to allow party members enjoy political equality and exercise their franchise.

Keywords: Godfatherism, Internal Democracy, All Progressive Congress, Primary Election and Zamfara State.

Introduction

All across the globe, democratic countries need political parties to recruit members to aggregate diverse opinions from society to produce a common policy and to also

perform the roles of educating electorates to make informed choice during elections. Political parties are essential components of representative democracy. Rasak (2017), argues that parties organize voters, aggregate and articulate interests, craft

policy alternatives, recruit and socialize new candidates for offices, set policymaking agenda, integrate disparate groups and individuals into the democratic process and provide the basis for coordinated electoral and legislative activity. Well-functioning political parties are therefore, central to the process of democratic development, (Muhammad, 2021). Election is a necessary condition for democracy and indeed central to democracy. This is for simple reasons that it gives opportunity for citizens of citizens to freely choose their leaders periodically. Freedom of choice, it has been argued, is at the very heart of democracy. (Shuaibu, 2019) In achieving these objectives, there should be proper internal democracy or intra party politics devoid of ethnicity, religious bigotry, clan cleavages and godfatherism. The lack of internal democracy is likely not only to cripple the parties internally, but also to adversely affect their electoral successes.

However, godfatherism has become a scary phenomenon in Nigerian politics. Though it is a longstanding and deeply rooted feature of the cultural values of Nigerian society, where it is purely socio-economic in nature and mutually productive for both parties, however, its politicization would appear to have contributed to the criminalization of politics. Furthermore, Nigeria has experienced tremendous role of godfatherism on the choice of party candidates. The implication is that contestants no longer rely on their popularity among the electorates and party manifestos, but on their choosing godfathers to help them secure electoral victories. This whole process undermines the usual popular sovereignty and

other attributes that make democracies unique and preferable than other system of government (Korikye, 2011).

Political parties have been facing all sort of anti-democratic setbacks including electoral manipulations and malpractices during primary and general elections. More often than not, both primary and main elections have been characterized by all kinds of illegal means of selecting candidates and generally lack of internal party democracy (Salawu, 2005). This suggests that the role of political parties in any democracy cannot be underestimated. They are the vehicles through which public officers seek recruitment into various public offices at different levels of government. Internal democracy in the other hand is a crucial factor for a peaceful coexistence and full development of a party system. Whether in multi-party or two-party system, political party serves as bedrock of democracy and its role in shaping democratic experience cannot be overemphasized.

It is undeniable that political parties have remained important and indispensable tools in strengthening and consolidating democracy in most democratic institutions in the world today. Arising from the catalytic feature of political parties, they serve as an intermediate role in democratic societies by acting as a connecting cord between the government and the people, thereby ensuring all tenets of democracy are upheld in the country (Olaoye, 2006). Political parties are makers of democracy such that no democratic or undemocratic settings can exist without them. Therefore, it is true that political parties pose as instrumental paddle of democratic foundations which employs diverse processes in ensuring that

democratic structures are guarded and protected. Essentially, they are carved as institutions which sponsor a wide range of aspiring political office holders through a formal and constitutional process, setting them aside as the party's official candidates (Nwankwo, 2014).

However, (Alli, 2015), argues that intra-party opposition, with particular reference to (PDP) experience in Nigeria's fourth republic has been complicated by the issue of godfatherism which the outcomes are inimical to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. This has led to the utter destruction of the party structure and ethos of (PDP) in many states in Nigeria.

Zamfara State's political landscape has been marred by significant challenges since its creation in 1996. As a state with Hausa and Fulani as the predominant ethnic groups, Zamfara has struggled with the influence of godfatherism, which has shaped and continue to shape the state's politics. The state's first civilian governor, Ahmad Sani Yariman Bakura, marked the beginning of a democratic government in 1999 under All People Party (APP).

There were multiple political parties in the state, but the four major political parties between 1999 and 2019 in Zamfara State were All Peoples Party (APP), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), All Progressives Congress and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) among others in the state. Other parties were in existence on paper but in the real sense, it could be described as one-party state controlled by the same political godfathers.

In 2018, nearly all the registered political parties conducted primary elections in the states in preparation for 2019 general elections. However, the most notable of all

these primaries was that of the APC because the aggrieved members who contested in the primaries alleged that the primaries were not only rigged but were not in line with the APC's constitution. Consequently, they challenged the result of the election at different courts for lack of credibility. This led to the nullification of the party victory by the Supreme Court which ultimately allowed the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to gain political leadership positions at all levels.

It is against this prism that, this study examines the impacts of godfatherism on the political landscape of Zamfara state and how lack of internal democracy in the APC subsequently led to the victory of the opposition PDP in the state.

Conceptual Review

The concept of godfatherism has its origin in Christianity (especially the Catholic faith), it implies a situation in which a man is chosen to act as a father to a Christian child or husband and wife to act as godparents to a Christian child in order for the latter to become god-fearing, obedient and law abiding (Udoh, 2011).

The concept is a Christian relationship that exists between a godfather with a sacred responsibility in the Christian faith to help nurture and train a child (the godsons) with the expectation that the godson becomes a mature and successful adult (Isaac, 2005). The idea of godfather and godson is more religiously inclined and of a moral value to the spiritual growth and development of the godson.

At baptism, the godson is formally initiated into the church. He is put under the supervision of the godfather who now becomes a role model, guiding the spiritual

life of the godson so that he does not go astray from the Christian precepts. Here, godfatherism is used in the positive sense of the word so as to help promote morality and uprightness in the Church (Coker, 2004). This is a situation where godfather sponsors or supports their benefactors or godsons and gives them advice on how to excel in their areas of assignments. The relationship creates a mutual atmosphere capable of enhancing social integration and provides good governance (Ajayi, 2010).

Concept of Political Party

In every democratic setting, democracy rest squarely on certain foundation and that foundation is the political party that means political party is the road map to democracy, without political party there is no democracy. Political parties are the principal mechanism for enhancing citizens participation and representation in public policy and in facts through which an individual's share democratic value. Party politics is the politics engage in by expressing through the channel of land or considered from the ideal of political parties as opposed to national interest (Nwankwo, 2014). Azeez (2014), also see party politics as activities of political parties in a democratic environment to dominate polity through democratic institution. To this end, party politics exist when elective ideas are present in a democratic system and the views, opinions or political philosophies are debated with the consciousness of promoting and protecting the interest of the party in power.

Concept of Democracy

Democracy as a concept is one of the fundamental features of the contemporary politics. There are few people or nation-state nowadays that did not practice democracy and claimed democratic. However, in an attempt to explain the concept, it should be appreciated that democracy is a very loaded concept which the entire essence cannot be capture by a single school of thought (Abiola, 2006). Democracy is a set of institutions that fulfill at least two essential requirements.

First, it must elicit as accurately as possible the opinion of many people as possible as who shall be their representatives and how the country ought to be governed. This means minimum universal universal suffrage, political parties, and organization of voting in acceptable elections at a relatively frequent interval. Secondly, it should provide some ways of ensuring that those chosen by the public do what the electorates want them to do or that they can be replaced if they do otherwise even between elections.

The Evolution of Godfatherism in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The literature tracing the history of godfatherism acknowledges its presence in Nigeria's First, Second, and Third Republics, often manifested through regional political titans like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello. However, scholars note a fundamental, toxic shift in the Fourth Republic (post-1999).

Modern godfatherism became visibly predatory and violent, as seen in the early 2000s crises in Anambra State (Chris Uba

vs. Chris Ngige) and Oyo State (Lamidi Adedibu vs. Rashidi Ladoja). In these cases, godfathers utilized state security apparatuses, thugs, and legislative impeachment threats to enforce compliance from recalcitrant governors (Alabi, 2013). (Chukwuma, 2008)

In recent years, the nature of godfatherism has evolved. Scholars observe that the most prominent contemporary godfathers are no longer just external financiers or regional kingpins, but outgoing state governors. Armed with massive state treasuries, control over local government structures, and influence over the state chapters of their political parties, sitting governors have transformed into "executive godfathers." This structural evolution set the stage directly for the 2019 Zamfara crisis, where an incumbent executive sought to institutionalize his dominance over the state's political architecture.

Intra-Party Democracy and the Failure of Primary Elections

A central theme in recent political science literature is the chronic lack of intra-party democracy within Nigerian political parties. Political parties are intended to be democratic testing grounds, yet they are frequently run as oligarchies.

Mechanisms of Imposition

Scholars identify several mechanisms through which internal democracy is subverted:

- **Consensus Candidates:** A process where elites bypass voting entirely, forcing aspirants to step down under the guise of party unity.

- **Imposition and Endorsements:** Publicly declaring a preferred candidate using state machinery, which effectively delegitimizes other contenders.
- **Manipulation of Delegates:** In indirect primaries, delegates are often bought, sequestered, or handpicked by the governor, rendering the voting process a mere formality.

The literature points out that the All Progressives Congress (APC) despite its progressive nomenclature—suffers from the same structural pathologies as its main rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The party's national leadership has repeatedly struggled to manage the conflicting interests of powerful state governors and the national working committee, a vulnerability that completely fractured the party in 2019 (Albert, 2015).

What Does Literature Say about Godfatherism and the 2019 All Progressives Congress (APC) Primary Election Crises in Zamfara State?

This review examines the intersection of godfatherism, intra-party democracy, and electoral conflict, focusing specifically on the 2019 All Progressives Congress (APC) primary election crises in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Godfatherism, a patron-client relationship wherein powerful political actors manipulate electoral processes to install proto-protégés remains a defining feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In the build-up to the 2019 general elections, Zamfara State became the epicenter of an intra-party feud driven by the godfatherist ambitions of the outgoing governor, Abdul'aziz Yari, and resisting factions. This review evaluates the structural

failures of intra-party democracy within the APC, chronicles the resulting judicial and electoral crises, and analyzes the broader implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The consolidation of democracy relies heavily on the internal democratic health of political parties. Ideally, parties serve as vehicles for aggregating public interests, fostering popular participation, and selecting candidates through transparent, institutionalized processes. However, in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, political parties have frequently operated as personalized vehicles controlled by wealthy elites and political "godfathers." Godfatherism is a deeply entrenched manifestation of political clientelism that has systematically undermined institutional mechanisms, replacing popular mandates with executive imposition and transactional politics.

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria highlighted the destructive potential of this phenomenon, most visibly within the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Zamfara State. The Zamfara APC primary elections collapsed into severe crisis, characterized by parallel primaries, violent clashes, and total systemic deadlock. The core of the conflict lay in the determination of the outgoing governor, Abdul'aziz Yari, to act as the ultimate political godfather by imposing his preferred successor, Mukhtar Shehu Idris, against fierce resistance from an opposing faction known as the *G-8*. This intra-party warfare ultimately led to a landmark judicial intervention by the Supreme Court of Nigeria, which voided all votes cast for the APC in Zamfara State during the 2019 general elections due to the absence of validly conducted primaries (Agbaje, & Adejumbi, 2016).

This literature review contextualizes and analyzes the scholarly discourse surrounding the 2019 Zamfara APC primary crises. By reviewing contemporary literature, this paper explores the conceptual dimensions of godfatherism in Nigeria, evaluates the institutional weaknesses that allow it to thrive, details the specific anatomy of the Zamfara crisis, and discusses its lasting implications for Nigeria's democratic trajectory.

The Anatomy of the 2019 APC Primary Crisis in Zamfara State: The Source of Contention

The 2019 crisis in Zamfara State serves as a classic case study of executive godfatherism clashing with factional resistance. Literature documenting this specific event highlights a multi-staged breakdown of the political and electoral process.

Governor Abdul'aziz Yari, nearing the end of his constitutional two-term limit, openly endorsed and positioned his Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Mukhtar Shehu Idris, as the APC gubernatorial candidate. This move was aggressively resisted by other powerful party stakeholders within the state, who formed a coalition known as the *G-8*. This opposing faction included high-profile figures such as Senator Kabir Marafa, the sitting Deputy Governor Ibrahim Wakkala, and the Minister of Defence, Mansur Dan-Ali (Sule, 2025).

The Parallel Primaries and Chaos

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) set a strict deadline of October 7, 2018, for the conduct of party primaries. Scholars detail how the

APC national headquarters, wary of Governor Yari's absolute control over the state party structure, opted for a direct primary mode in Zamfara to level the playing field (Femi, & Udochi, 2025).

Yari's faction resisted this, insisting on indirect primaries or a consensus arrangement that favored Idris. The ensuing attempts to hold primaries were marred by logistical sabotage, widespread violence, and conflicting declarations. Ultimately, both factions conducted parallel exercises: Yari's faction claimed Idris won their primary, while the G-8 faction declared their own results or argued that no valid election took place. Because of the chaotic failure to meet the statutory guidelines within the stipulated window, INEC subsequently declared that the APC had failed to conduct valid primaries in Zamfara State and was therefore ineligible to field candidates for the 2019 general elections (Ibrahim, 2019).

Judicial Intervention and the Supreme Court Judgment

The Zamfara crisis shifted from a political battlefield to a legal one, generating extensive commentary from legal and political scholars. The core of the legal dispute was whether the courts could interfere in the internal affairs of a political party, and whether the APC had indeed conducted a legal primary election.

The legal battle culminated in the historic Supreme Court ruling on May 24, 2019 (*All Progressives Congress v. Senator Kabir Garba Marafa & Ors*). The apex court ruled unanimously that the APC did not conduct valid primary elections in accordance with the Electoral Act and the party's own constitution (Shadrack, 2019).

The court took the unprecedented step of voiding all votes cast for the APC in the 2019 general elections in Zamfara State. It declared that the votes cast for the APC were "wasted votes" because the party had no candidates in law. Consequently, the court ordered that the runner-up candidates with the required constitutional spread be sworn into office. This sweeping judgment resulted in the PDP—which had lost heavily at the polls inheriting the governorship, all national assembly seats, and all state assembly seats in Zamfara State.

Scholars widely praise the judgment as a bold judicial assertion against the impunity of godfatherism. It sent a clear message to political actors that the subversion of internal democracy carries severe, fatal electoral consequences. Conversely, some legal analysts caution that relying entirely on the judiciary to resolve intra-party conflicts risks over-judicializing politics and taking the power of choice away from the actual electorate (Sule, 2025).

The 2019 All Progressives Congress primary election crisis in Zamfara State remains a definitive case study of the destructive impact of godfatherism on Nigeria's democratic framework. The literature demonstrates that when political patrons prioritize personal prebendal ambitions over institutionalized rules and popular sovereignty, the entire democratic apparatus risks collapse.

Governor Yari's attempt to impose a successor met with intense factional resistance, triggering a systemic breakdown that the party's internal mechanisms could not resolve. The resulting Supreme Court judgment served as a watershed moment, punishing

political impunity by stripping the ruling party of its entire electoral sweep. Ultimately, the Zamfara crisis underscores the urgent, ongoing need for political parties in Nigeria to institutionalize internal democracy, reduce the influence of executive patrons, and embrace transparent processes to safeguard the integrity of the nation's democratic consolidation (Alabi, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Elite theory was used on the basis that the theory assumes that all men love power and the basis for all contestation is power. Hence, through the elite theory we have been able to understand that those in power do not want to surrender power easily but to hold on to it tenaciously and through all means. It states that all men are not all endowed alike. Hence, the emphasis on the psychological and intellectual superiority obtained by the elite. It further reinforces the psychological, intellectual and other differences that set apart the political elite from the non-elite.

The theory emphasizes inequality rather than equality in the society. It stresses the belief that the elites are the highest accomplishees in their fields and that the political

elite are imbued with personal resources such as social skills, intelligence and special

interest in politics. The theory divides the society into two different groups because politics is essentially, a relationship between rulers and the ruled and it is defined in terms of power. It is the ruling class that produces the power elite, the power wielding minority group, in any society. Furthermore, it emphasizes the rule by the minority over

the majority in any society. The society is usually ruled by the political elite, a minority group of achievers in politics who are highly organized, cohesive and will do everything to secure, conserve, preserve and perpetuate its power over a majority that is largely unorganized.

The strength of elite theory within the context of this study lies in the fact that it increases and extends awareness of the masses against the government and the ruling class. As a result, many researchers have been conducted on the application of democracy in an organization. It contributes better understanding of social and political life of the societies. The theory contributed to the development of democracy by showing the differences between theory, constitution and practical application of democracy that have led to the creation of more viable and applicable theories of democracy in many societies, including the political dynamics of 2019 APC primaries in Zamfara State.

Research Methodology

There is no single or definitive approach to conduct research. However, in social science research, there are two main methods namely; quantitative and qualitative. The nature of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher's time, and the resources available have a significant impact on how each approach is used. The qualitative method was used for this investigation. Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This implies that qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural contexts, aiming to make sense of or interpret occurrences in terms of people's meanings. The study and

collection of various empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and challenging moments and meanings in individuals' lives constitute qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

Research Design: Case Study

A case study research design was used for the investigation of the phenomenon in question. The ability to examine the varied experiences of various stakeholder; political party (APC) officials, Civil Society Organizations (CSO's), Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC), candidates involved in Zamfara state 2019 Primary Election in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The key benefit of using a case study approach allowed assisted in capturing the complexity of godfatherism and internal democracy with reference to Zamfara State 2019 APC primary election as a phenomenon, without the risk of oversampling or making broad generalizations.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. As part of qualitative methodology, an in-depth interview with relevant stake holders involved in Zamfara state 2019 Primary Election in Zamfara State organized for the collection of primary data from key respondents. Furthermore, secondary data was generated from document obtained from INEC, political party archive, party's constitution and; books; journals; newspapers; and other published materials. The information obtained from these sources was examined critically in light of the study's goals.

Data Collection Method/Instruments

The in-depth interview was used to collect primary data for the study. This approach is chosen because it provides a more thorough explanation of the phenomenon and detailed information that was difficult to obtain using quantitative method.

Population of the Study and Sample Size

The population of this study includes some stakeholders in the primary electoral process in Zamfara State 2019 primaries. These stakeholders are political party (APC) officials, civil society organizations, the electoral body-INEC, candidates engaged in primary elections. On the whole, a sample size of twenty-five (25) respondents were interviewed.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling strategy was used in this investigation. Purposive sampling focuses on a specific subset of the sample population. The goal of using this approach is to find pre-identified respondents who, from their strategic location, knowledge, experience and expertise can contribute information that could enhance the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, only respondents that are knowledgeable about the topic were selected for the interview.

Method of Data Analysis

Thematic method of data analysis was used to analyze the information gathered from the In-depth Interview. This was chosen for theoretical flexibility in discovering, characterizing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within a data set in considerable detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic method works

effectively with any qualitative study that aims to investigate intricate research topics like godfatherism and internal democracy. However, by using this approach, the researchers were able to extract only the information that is required; and thus prevented the important data from being obscured. As a result, the data is rationally presented and examined to offer first-hand knowledge that provides analytical backing for the studied pertinent literature.

Data Presentation and Analysis of the Result

The research relies mainly on secondary sources of data and in-depth interviews to collect data from the target respondents. The key objective of the in-depth interview was to complement the data derived from the secondary sources to interrogate the relationship Godfatherism

and Internal democracy (an examination of the 2019 APC Primary election in Zamfara State). Specifically, the interview questions were designed to unveil whether or not Godfatherism is an impediment to democracy and more importantly to suggest a more effective approach to enhance our democratic institutions to effectively functions as an instrument of good governance. To address the main and rival research question/hypotheses, a total of 25 respondents were selected purposively in the following order; 5 APC Party executives, 3 APC Party delegates, 3 APC Primary election aspirants, 3 Registered party members, 2 INEC officials, 3 Senior Academics with expertise on Elections, 3 Members from Civil Society Organizations 3 Legal Practitioners.

Table 1: Six steps framework adopted for thematic analysis of the data collected

Step	Item	Activity
Step-1	Data Familiarity	The first step in any qualitative analysis is reading, and re reading the transcripts. In this stage the researcher is very familiar with the entire body of data collected through in-depth interview. With the aid of notes, every piece of raw data generated from the fieldwork was translated, recorded, and transcribed.
Step-2	Generation initial Codes	In this phase, all the data is to organize in a meaningful and systematic way. Coding reduces lots of data into small chunks of meaning. There are

		different ways to code and the method will be determined by the researcher's perspective and research questions.
Step-3	Search for themes	A theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question. As Braun & Clarke (2006) explain, there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a theme. A theme is characterised by its significance. At this stage, the study developed preliminary themes. We consider the main research objectives, questions, and interesting facts about the data that were generated through the in-depth interview.
Step- 4	Review of themes	During this phase we review, modify and develop the preliminary themes that we identified in step 3 by including what is significant to the objectives of the study and exclude what is irrelevant to the research objectives and Assumptions of the study.
Step-5	Define themes	This is the final refinement of the themes and the aim is to ' <i>identify the 'essence' of what each theme is about.</i> ' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) Here, with the aid of a thematic map, we defined and refined the themes to identify what each theme/subtheme is all about, their relationship to one another and what narrative

		best explains the influence of godfatherism and internal Democracy.
Step-6	Write-up	Usually the end-point of research is some kind of report, often a journal article or dissertation. At the final stage, the study concluded by deriving some research findings, outlined some useful recommendations, and set a further research agenda

Developing codes and preliminary themes

Table 2: Preliminary themes derived from interview transcripts

1. Theme: Respondents description on the impact of godfatherism on internal democracy within the APC 2019 Zamfara State Primaries. Codes: - Internal Democracy Doesn't exist - Godfatherism is inevitable - Excessive party control - Individual impact - Financial influence - Elite Domination	2. Theme: The Role of Political Godfathers in Shaping Candidate Selection and Party Decision-Making within the APC in Zamfara State during the 2019 Elections. Codes: - Incompetency - Personal interest - Consensus - Disenfranchisement - Confusion - Chaos
3. Theme: Party Members' Perceptions of Godfatherism and Its Impact on Internal Democracy within the APC during the 2019 Primaries in Zamfara State. Codes: - It was an unjust arrangement - Unequal opportunities - agreement - disagreement - the party was divided	4. Theme: The Implications of Godfatherism on Party Unity and Electoral Success of the APC in Zamfara State. Codes: - Illegality - Disunity - Dissatisfaction - Lost of power - Favoritism

- internal forces	- Godfatherism
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6.3 Review of themes

In the table below, we reviewed the themes presented above, we modified preliminary themes generated from the responses of Godfatherism and internal democracy an examination of APC Primary election in Zamfara State 2019 by excluding what is irrelevant or unrelated to the main research question of the study.

Table 3: Reviewed themes derive from step 4 above

5. Theme: Respondents description on the impact of godfatherism on internal democracy within the APC 2019 Zamfara State Primaries. Codes: - Internal Democracy Doesn't exist - Godfatherism is inevitable - Excessive party control - Individual impact - Financial influence - Elite Domination	6. Theme: The Role of Political Godfathers in Shaping Candidate Selection and Party Decision-Making within the APC in Zamfara State during the 2019 Elections. Codes: - Incompetency - Personal interest - Consensus - Disenfranchisement - Confusion - Chaos
7. Theme: Party Members' Perceptions of Godfatherism and Its Impact on Internal Democracy within the APC during the 2019 Primaries in Zamfara State. Codes: - It was an unjust arrangement - Unequal opportunities - agreement - disagreement - the party was divided - internal forces	8. Theme: The Implications of Godfatherism on Party Unity and Electoral Success of the APC in Zamfara State. Codes: - Illegality - Disunity - Dissatisfaction - Lost of power - Favoritism - Godfatherism

Defining themes

The raw data presented in tables connotes a consensus among all the categories of the respondents that there is influence of Godfatherism which triggered

disenfranchisement as well devastating internal democracy in the 2019 All Progressive Congress (APC) primaries in Zamfara State, particularly imposition of candidates for the party without regards for the APC constitution. It further

revealed the rigidity of the Governor and the monopolistic ideology of the party. The argument is what constitutes the Godfatherism in the party? In other words, why is it that party constitution is not respected? What specifically brings about Godfatherism and favoritism in the party? Which actor (s) is responsible for the menace? What is the source of this heinous act that undermines the democratic ideals? These questions and many more must be addressed before an objective perspective can emerge.

Conclusion

The 2019 APC primary election crisis in Zamfara State offers a powerful illustration of the dangers that godfatherism poses to internal party democracy in Nigeria. It reveals how a political culture built on individual dominance, rather than institutional processes, can lead to the breakdown of democratic norms within political parties. This case provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the broader implications of political godfatherism on party development, electoral integrity, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. At its core, internal democracy is the engine that drives genuine political competition, inclusiveness, and party legitimacy. When it is weakened by godfatherism, party primaries become a theatre for imposition, manipulation, and elite capture. The result is not only the marginalization of credible candidates but also the erosion of trust among party members and voters. This undermines both the functionality of political parties and the representative nature of electoral democracy.

The APC's failure in Zamfara demonstrates how the personal ambitions

of a few actors can override collective party interests. The imposition of candidates and the parallel primaries conducted by rival factions led to confusion, litigation, and eventually disqualification by the courts. The party's inability to enforce discipline and maintain internal order revealed a systemic weakness that was exploited by power brokers, most notably the former governor acting as a political godfather. This scenario also underscores the importance of strong party institutions that can resist the pressures of political godfathers. A party that depends on individuals rather than rules and procedures is susceptible to instability. Strengthening internal party mechanisms such as fair nomination procedures, independent electoral committees, and conflict resolution frameworks is essential to limiting godfatherism and enhancing internal democracy.

Moreover, the role of oversight institutions like INEC and the judiciary was instrumental in upholding democratic standards. Their firm stance in the Zamfara case helped protect the sanctity of the electoral process, even if it meant punishing a major ruling party. However, such interventions should not be the first line of defense. Political parties themselves must assume primary responsibility for upholding internal democracy. The Zamfara crisis also highlights the need for democratic education within parties. Members must understand their rights and the importance of participatory politics. This requires deliberate efforts by parties, civil society, and electoral bodies to promote political awareness and empower grassroots

participation, thereby reducing the space for undemocratic practices.

Summary of Research Findings

Godfatherism is a deeply rooted feature of Nigeria's political landscape, where influential individuals often wealthy, powerful, or politically entrenched exert outsized control over party affairs and candidate selection. This phenomenon undermines democratic values by distorting internal party processes. Nowhere was this more apparent than during the 2019 All Progressives Congress (APC) primary elections in Zamfara State, where godfatherism significantly disrupted internal party democracy and led to one of the most consequential legal and political outcomes in recent Nigerian history.

Internal party democracy is critical to the strength and legitimacy of any political system. It ensures that party candidates emerge through transparent, participatory, and competitive means, reflecting the will of the party base. When this process is hijacked by political godfathers, however, democratic ideals are sacrificed for personal ambition and patronage. In Zamfara, the 2019 APC primaries became a battleground not just for electoral candidacy but for control of the party structure itself, revealing how entrenched godfatherism had become.

The political crisis in Zamfara was largely shaped by former Governor Abdul'aziz Yari, who sought to retain control over the party's political machinery after the end of his tenure. His attempt to impose loyalists as candidates across all levels of governance triggered internal revolt. Rather than allowing a level playing field, Yari's faction orchestrated a parallel

primary election process, allegedly excluding aspirants who did not align with his political agenda. One of the most vocal critics of this imposition was Senator Kabiru Marafa, who accused Yari of bypassing party constitution to manipulate the primary election in favor of his candidates.

On the other hand, Marafa's faction also conducted its own primaries, resulting in two conflicting candidate lists submitted to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The confusion and division within the APC hierarchy in Zamfara quickly spiraled into a full-blown crisis. INEC, tasked with ensuring electoral integrity, ultimately declared that the APC had failed to conduct valid primaries in the state. The commission cited the conflicting claims from both factions and the apparent lack of credible, verifiable primary results. This ruling set off a wave of litigation, as both sides battled for legitimacy in the courts. What began as a power tussle fueled by godfatherism escalated into a constitutional and electoral debacle.

The legal proceedings culminated in a landmark Supreme Court judgment in May 2019. The court ruled that APC had no valid candidates for the general election in Zamfara due to its failure to follow proper procedures during the primaries. As a result, all APC victories in the state ranging from the governorship to legislative seats were annulled and awarded to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which had come second in the vote count. This outcome was a monumental setback for the APC and a rare example of legal institutions holding political actors accountable for anti-democratic practices.

However, the ruling did not undo the deeper damage that godfatherism had already inflicted on the internal cohesion of the party and the broader democratic process. Rather, it exposed how easily political structures can be subverted when too much power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. Godfatherism weakens party institutions by replacing collective decision-making with unilateral control. It encourages loyalty to individuals rather than party ideology or the electorate. When candidates emerge through imposition rather than competition, the party loses its moral authority and electoral credibility. This disillusionment among party members often leads to voter apathy, internal sabotage, and electoral loss, as was evident in Zamfara.

The fall of APC in Zamfara also signaled how godfatherism alienates other party stakeholders. By sidelining legitimate contenders and ignoring due process, Yari's faction bred resentment and rebellion. The party became ungovernable, with parallel structures and communication breakdowns eroding its effectiveness. The cost of such recklessness was not only legal but political and reputational.

Recommendations

1. The Zamfara APC crisis underscores the urgent need for political parties in Nigeria to institutionalize transparent and credible internal democratic procedures. If the APC in Zamfara had conducted open and verifiable primaries, the party could have avoided the production of parallel candidate lists and legal disqualification by the courts. Thus,

political parties must ensure internal mechanisms are not overridden by individual interests. Going forward, parties must adopt standardized, transparent primary procedures and make their outcomes binding to avoid the chaos experienced in Zamfara. A major lesson from Zamfara is the importance of enforcing internal party rules.

2. The crisis was largely driven by the failure of the APC leadership both at the state and national levels to enforce its own guidelines regarding candidate selection. The refusal to discipline powerful figures like former Governor Yari, who sought to impose candidates without consensus, revealed the dangers of selective enforcement. Political parties must therefore build the institutional capacity and political will to enforce discipline impartially, regardless of the influence of the offender. However, empowering the grassroots is also crucial, as the Zamfara case showed how party members were excluded from meaningful participation. Candidates were imposed by elites without broad-based consultation, leading to resistance and factionalism. Political education and inclusive party structures would empower ordinary members to demand accountability and transparency. If APC members at the ward and local government levels had been properly involved in candidate selection, the legitimacy of the process would not have been contested.
3. INEC must be granted more proactive powers in supervising party

primaries, especially in politically volatile states like Zamfara. In 2019, INEC's rejection of APC's candidate list was reactive rather than preventive. If the Commission had stronger oversight authority, it might have been able to stop the flawed primaries before the situation escalated. Legal reforms should empower INEC to directly monitor and validate primaries, ensuring that party processes meet democratic standards from the outset

4. Furthermore, the judiciary's intervention in Zamfara was decisive and commendable, but the delay in resolving the crisis until after the general elections created confusion. This highlights the need for electoral tribunals or courts to fast-track intra-party pre-election cases. Early judicial resolution would allow parties to make timely corrections and avoid the loss of electoral opportunities. A quicker judicial process could have prevented APC from contesting the elections with uncertainty, only to lose all seats afterward,
5. Leadership rotation within political parties would also reduce the entrenchment of political godfathers like Yari, whose grip on the party machinery in Zamfara led to exclusion and confrontation. When leadership is periodically rotated and decentralized, no individual can dominate party structures or dictate outcomes. This encourages open competition and diminishes the risk of intra-party dictatorship, as seen in the Zamfara APC chapter. However, strengthening the influence of voters and delegates requires systemic

reforms. Electoral bodies must ensure credible, transparent elections that respect the will of voters. Political parties must reform their internal processes to protect delegates from undue influence and ensure they truly represent the grassroots.

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