A theoretical analysis of Nigerian politicians and their godfathers

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Abstract

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Political decision-making in Nigeria is often influenced by a system of patron-client relationships, commonly referred to as Godfatherism. This study examines how political Godfathers shape the policy choices of politicians and, in turn, affect democratic accountability. By extending the Maskin and Tirole (2004) model, this paper introduces the role of campaign contributions from Godfathers as a critical factor in affecting political choices.

The theoretical framework considers a two-period model where elected politicians choose between policies that align with public welfare or the preferences of their Godfathers. The model accounts for re-election incentives, voter awareness, and institutional strength, revealing that politicians are likelier to prioritize the Godfather's interests over public needs when electoral accountability is weak. The study also compares three governance structures which are Direct Democracy, Judicial Power, and Representative Democracy, to evaluate which system minimizes the distortive effects of this elite influence.

Contents

1 Introduction

Democracy is a system where citizens have the chance to engage in selecting their government representatives. It empowers the citizens or elect individuals to represent them in the government, emphasizing majority rule. It comprises components such as free and fair elections for choosing and replacing the government, active citizen participation in politics and civic affairs, protection of human rights for all citizens, and a legal system that applies equally to everyone. This process allows a significant portion of the population to have an impact on governmental decision-making processes. Maskin and Tirole (2004) also believe the idea behind democracy is that public decisions should reflect the will of the people. In this paper, we will be focusing on the democracy practiced in Nigeria.

Nigeria, popularly known as the "Giant of Africa," is a nation with a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and customs. However, its political scene is marked by challenges and complexities. From its past to its transitions from military rule to democracy, Nigeria's politics embodies a blend of historical influences, socio-economic factors, and institutional structures. But one phenomenon that is very conversant with Nigeria's politics is the concept of the "Godfather", which is a vital part of what this paper will be looking into.

Adeoye (2009) sees a Godfather as a kingmaker and principal who has earned respect and a loyal following (voters) within the community, and such influence can help ensure the success of their preferred candidates in elections. These Godfathers have Godsons (politicians) who benefit from this influence and in return pledge loyalty. Godfathers can also be defined as investors who invest in parties, provide support for voter mobilization, and handle the aspects of candidate's election expenses leveraging their significant financial resources according to Olarinmoye (2008).

In Nigeria, Scott (1972) believes the system of godfatherism functions based on webs of patron-client connections where loyalty and dedication are traded for political backing, financial aid, and influence. The Godfather, typically holding a position of wealth and power, offers advice, security, and support to their godsons in return, for loyalty, compliance, and political support. It should also be noted that the focus of the Godfather is self-development and not necessarily for the good of society. The politician has a political position that may or may not be consistent with the public's opinion. Thus, the politician gets a payoff of G when he chooses his favorite action.

This paper will be building on Maskin and Tirole (2004) where politicians' choices are affected by either wanting to leave a legacy or wanting to hold office because of the perks and influence gotten from the office. By contrast, in this paper campaign contributions made by the Godfathers would be introduced as a motive that affects the politician's choices. By framing Godfatherism as an economic problem rather than just a political one, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of how elite dominance distorts democratic accountability and economic development in Nigeria.

The public can use the information obtained from this paper to know the impact of these campaign contributions on the decision-making process of the politicians, thereby making them accountable by requiring re-election since politicians in Nigeria serve for two terms. This re-election can help the public get rid of the politicians that align with the Godfathers but at the same time, since a term is four years, some politicians would do the bidding of the Godfather and be open to leaving the position and aiming at a higher position with the

Godfather's help.

2 Overview

Section 1 of this paper introduced the concept of Godfatherism in Nigeria, what it represents, and the overall definitions of the concept that the paper would focus on.

In section 3, the paper explores Godfatherism in Nigeria with examples and the institutional weakness.

Section 4 paper delves into the related literature, picking a few of the relevant literature and what the conclusions were. Also literature that had the opinion that Godfatherism can have its good effects.

Section 5 goes on to explain the model that the paper is built on. It is a two-period model with a homogenous electorate. There are two periods, in each period there is a decision of either choosing "a" which is the popular action or "b" which is the unpopular action. The popular action is what the public believes to be the optimal action. There is also the assumption that all politicians have a Godfather. The politician is either congruent with the Godfather or incongruent. The subsection 'Comparison of Welfare of the Public under the Three Political Institutions' looks at different cases of accountability and how the politician would behave and make policy decisions when he knows the public has an idea of his preference.

Finally, section 6 concludes and discusses the paper and how it can be used for further research.

3 Godfatherism in Nigeria

In Nigerian politics, the concept of Godfatherism involves influential individuals, known as godfathers wielding significant power over political appointments and election outcomes. The political Godfathers in Nigeria build an array of loyalists around them and use their influence which is often tied to monetary considerations to manipulate the rest of the society.

Kennedy (2020) suggests these Godfathers use their wealth and influence to decide who gets nominated and wins elections across all levels of government. The relationship between Godfathers and their Godsons is transactional as the Godfather ensures victories for the Godson, who then uses their political authority to advance the interests of the Godfather in social, economic, and political realms according to Albert (2005). The politicians do not go against their godfathers because of the benefits they are guaranteed if they remain loyal.

An important example would be the case of Anambra state. Also known as the 'Light of the Nation', Anambra state is one of the thirty-six states in Nigeria that has experienced a huge impact of Godfatherism in politics. Chinwoke Mbadinuju was sworn in as the civilian governor of Anambra State following years of military rule. According to Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) between 1999 and 2003, there was a power struggle between Emeka Offor, who was the Godfather to Governor Mbadinuju, because he resisted the influence of his benefactor. Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) states that Chief Emeka Offor supported Mbadinuju in securing the governorship in 1999. However, during Mbadinuju's time in office, he spent more time trying to regain control of the state's resources from Offor's control, leading to a neglect of critical governance issues due to the intense conflict between them which also led to Mbadinuju losing the reelection.

In the 2003 election another Godfather emerged, Chris Uba, and he even boasted of being the greatest Godfather, as he was able to put a politician in position in every state. Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) explain that he had a godson, Chris Ngige. Ngige agreed to the relationship with Uba and made oaths in the Okija shrine in Anambra state. Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) write that based on the agreement, Uba bankrolled Ngige for the national election with three billion naira and he won. [1]

Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) explains that Ngige changed his mind when he got into office and tried getting the state resources back from Uba but, was asked to return the money used to bankroll his election when Ngige refused. Uba went as far as abducting Ngige and publicly confessing that he rigged the election which made the election that year void. Consequently, Peter Obi won the election petition tribunal and became the Governor of Anambra state.

While this is not exclusive to Nigeria, this practice is notably prominent in its electoral politics and governance due to various factors such as economic circumstances and party structures. Oghuvbu (2023) says that the pliable criminal and social justice system is one of the factors for godfatherism to thrive in Nigeria. Ugwu, Izueke, and Obasi (2013) also have the opinion that other factors are a profit-seeking patron, an easily influenced political system that caters only to a selected few in the society, a poor electoral system, relentless office seekers, and the least trustworthy media always ready to do the bidding of the interests of the highest bidder in society.

Godfathers heavily invest in their chosen candidates by providing financial support for nomination processes and campaigning efforts. This investment extends beyond money to include garnering support through methods like violence, election manipulation, and rigging tactics. Consequently, elected officials in Nigeria often prioritize loyalty to their Godfathers over allegiance to the public, thereby undermining values and public accountability standards. Tensions can arise within the Godfather and Godson relationship if the latter attempts independence from the former which can lead to turmoil and unrest in society. It is also important to note that not all political donors are Godfathers, but all Godfathers are political donors.

The culture of Godfatherism presents an obstacle to democracy in Nigeria as it centralizes authority among a select few, overthrows the electoral system, and obstructs the establishment of a truly inclusive and transparent political framework.

3.1 Institutional Weaknesses and the Economics of Godfatherism

The persistence of Godfatherism in Nigeria is not just a political phenomenon, it is an economic outcome of institutional weaknesses that allow elites to extract political rents. This section examines why weak institutions sustain elite dominance and how economic

1. Three billion naira as at 2003 was valued at approximately four hundred and eleven million United States Dollars.

constraints shape political behavior.

1. **Weak Electoral Institutions Enable Political Market Failures**: Political markets, like economic markets, can fail when institutions fail to enforce rules that ensure fair competition. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) lacks the autonomy and enforcement power to prevent vote-buying, rigging, and elite influence over party primaries (Bratton 2008; LeVan 2019). Campaign finance laws are weak, allowing unlimited private funding, which strengthens the Godfather influence (Collier and Vicente 2012). Additionally, judicial inefficiency prevents timely prosecution of political corruption, allowing Godfathers to operate with impunity. In weak democracies like this, political markets fail due to unchecked patronage, lack of enforcement, and elite monopoly over electoral outcomes (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2000).

2. **Voter Behavior in a Weak Economic Environment**: Economic constraints influence voter rationality, making clientelism and Godfatherism attractive to low-income voters. Nigeria has high poverty and unemployment rates, which reduce voter independence, making vote-buying and patronage more effective (Wantchekon 2003). Short-term survival needs (money, food, jobs) outweigh concerns about long-term governance quality. Low access to political information (due to media control by elites) also weakens voter accountability (Lindberg 2010). By contrast, in high-income democracies, voters demand policy performance (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

3. **The Political Economy of Public Resource Allocation**: In a Godfather-dominated system, public resources are allocated based on elite interests rather than social welfare according to (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). Public contracts and procurement deals are often awarded to firms linked to political elites, reducing competition and innovation (Hodler and Raschky 2014). Many infrastructure projects and social programs are underfunded or redirected to reward political sponsors. Even budget allocations prioritize elite interests (e.g., luxury government spending) rather than critical sectors like education, healthcare, and public services. Countries with weak institutions experience higher fiscal leakages, rent-seeking, and inefficient public spending (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2000).

4 Related Literature

This paper builds on a lot of literature as most papers on Godfatherism in Nigeria are built on political science theories like clientelism and are more of conceptual analysis and recommendations of what can be done to reduce the Godfatherism issue. I will provide an overview of selected literature on Godfatherism and campaign contribution in Nigeria and some parts of the world.

To better understand the strategic interactions between politicians, godfathers, and voters, this research draws on three key political economy theories:

- Principal-Agent Theory
- Clientelism & Patronage Theory
- Elite Theory

These are the theories that looks into Godfatherism and they will be expanded on below. Also more specific literature would be in the subsection "Nigeria and the rest of the world".

4.1 Principal-Agent Theory

The **Principal-Agent Model** explains governance failures and corporate mismanagement by analyzing the misalignment of incentives between **principals (citizens, voters, or shareholders)** and **agents (politicians, bureaucrats, or managers)**. Jensen and Meckling (1976) expand on Principal-Agent Theory, which explains how politicians (agents) are expected to act in the best interests of the public (principals), but instead align with Godfathers (alternative principals) due to economic dependencies. When agents have private information and weak oversight, they may prioritize **self-interest** over public or shareholder welfare.

4.1.1 Agency Theory in Political Economy and Governance

Governments act as **agents** representing the public (**principals**), but due to weak oversight, they may:

- **Engage in rent-seeking** – Using public resources for personal gain.
- **Favor elite interests** – Serving political donors or godfathers over citizens.
- **Create inefficient policies** – Prioritizing projects that benefit politicians rather than the public.

The government's utility function reflects this trade-off:

$$U_g = \pi_g G + (1 - \pi_g) R$$

where:

- U_g = Utility of the government.
- π_g = Probability of staying in power due to elite support.
- G = Benefits from serving elite interests.
- R = Rewards from good governance (voter trust, economic growth).

If $G > R$, the government prioritizes **elite capture** over public welfare.

Ownership Type	Agency Problem	Solution
Public Corporations	Managerial opportunism, risk aversion	Stock options, Board monitoring
State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs)	Bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption	Institutional autonomy, Performance-based pay
Family-Owned Firms	Minority shareholder exploitation	Independent directors, Governance reforms

Table 1: Impact of Ownership Structure on Managerial Behavior

4.1.2 Agency Theory in Ownership Structure and Managerial Behavior

Ownership structures influence how managers (agents) behave:

Example: In many **African SOEs**, weak governance allows political interference, leading to **inefficient resource allocation and corruption**.

4.1.3 Financial Incentives and Governance Efficiency

In both **public governance and corporate management**, incentives shape behavior:

- **Performance-Based Pay** – Linking rewards to measurable outcomes reduces **moral hazard**.
- **Board Oversight & Regulatory Reforms** – Independent institutions reduce **political capture**.
- **Market Discipline** – In competitive economies, firms and governments face **accountability pressures**.

Empirical Insight: Countries with **strong institutions** align public and private sector incentives more effectively than **patronage-driven economies (e.g., Nigeria)**. In weak institutional settings, Godfathers finance election campaigns, ensuring that politicians prioritize elite interests (private rents, contracts, and monopolies) over public welfare (infrastructure, education, and healthcare).

In conclusion, the **Principal-Agent Model** highlights how governance failures and corporate inefficiencies arise due to misaligned incentives. Strengthening **institutional oversight, reducing information asymmetry, and aligning incentives** can improve accountability in both **public and private sectors**.

4.2 Clientelism & Patronage Theory

: Scott (1972) describes Clientelism as a system where politicians engage in vote-buying and patronage networks instead of providing broad-based public goods. In Nigeria, political Godfathers build loyal voter bases by offering short-term benefits (cash, jobs, food, or contracts), ensuring compliance in elections.

4.3 Elite Theory

: Pareto (1935) emphasizes that political power is concentrated among a small elite that controls economic and political institutions to maintain dominance. In Nigeria, Godfathers act as gatekeepers of political office, determining who gets nominated, elected, and granted access to economic opportunities.

4.4 Nigeria and the rest of the world

Kennedy (2020) states that the origins of Godfatherism in Nigeria can be linked back to the First Republic, where the primary political parties (NPC, AG, NCNC) nurtured proteges to promote their agendas. Yet the initial Godfathers displayed a benevolent and fair-minded approach compared to today's political Godfathers. The author argues that it is crucial to stop the influence of Godfathers and enhance institutions to address the harmful impact of this patron-client relationship on Nigeria's democracy. In essence, the paper portrays Godfatherism as a harmful aspect of Nigerian politics that hampers democracy and progress.

Yahaya and Abba (2021) also view Godfatherism as a barrier to democracy in Nigeria as it consolidates power among a select group of elites while excluding the general populace from meaningful political involvement. The article contends that Godfatherism has had effects on Nigeria's socioeconomic progress with politicians prioritizing the interests of their godfathers over those of the wider public. In essence, the paper presents Godfatherism as a democratic system of political favoritism and elite influence peddling that undermines the people's voice in Nigeria. It also asserts that this phenomenon poses a challenge to effective governance and progress in the nation. The paper also uses the Elite theory of Alfredo Pareto in 1935 as the main framework to explain the concept of Godfatherism. Elite Theory sees the elites as the political players governing the state and national resources, occupying key positions related to power networks. Power can be achieved by the elites through material and/or figurative resources, and elites can be defined as those in control of capital.

Nwagwu (2010) has a slightly different perspective, he believed that having a mentor in politics, known as godfatherism is considered beneficial in the arena. It involves individuals learning from experienced statesmen to excel in governance and adopt their mentor's charisma to become successful politicians. In essence, political godfatherism in Nigeria is described as a situation where influential figures influence the selection and election of officeholders, within a state. This practice is viewed as both mentoring and detrimental (misuse of power) depending on its implementation.

Ruiz (2017) uses a regression discontinuity (RD) design exploiting close electoral races. He compared outcomes in municipalities in Colombia where the donor-funded politician barely won or lost the election. According to the details outlined in this research paper, the main outcome of electing a politician funded by donors is that the chances of a donor's company securing contracts from the elected official doubles the likelihood of those donors' securing contracts, while also increasing the chances of incumbents facing disciplinary actions by over 100%. Also, contracts granted to donor-affiliated companies often involve a "minimum value modality," which entails scrutiny and supervision. Moreover, these contracts typically come with price tags compared to non-donor contracts of a similar nature. Implementing campaign finance restrictions that limit donor contributions can potentially mitigate the tendency for donor-backed politicians to show favoritism towards their donors when awarding contracts. In essence, these key repercussions include heightened favoritism towards campaign contributors in contract allocation, reduced oversight and transparency in these agreements, and an elevated risk of corruption and measures for the elected leader. The author argues that enforcing campaign finance limits could be instrumental in addressing these challenges.

Foreman (2018) suggests that in the United States of America money's impact on politics has allowed affluent individuals and big corporations to manipulate the system. The author highlights a gap between what the public wants in policies and what becomes law, showing that laws often favor donors rather than regular citizens. In essence, the paper argues that money's disproportionate influence on politics has tainted democracy leading elected officials to prioritize wealthy donors over the public. The solution proposed is an amendment to set up a public campaign finance system.

5 Model and Analysis with Godfather Power

Our paper is built mainly on Maskin and Tirole (2004) as their study formally studies how accountability shapes government decision-making. Maskin and Tirole (2004) introduce a model featuring two time periods, each with two actions. The optimal choice is determined randomly for each period keeping the public unaware of which action is beforehand. The study explores three government structures, direct democracy, representative democracy, and judicial authority. It concludes that the effective government type hinges on the level of officials' commitment to their roles. When this commitment is strong direct democracy or judicial power is favored, while weak representative democracy prevails. Additionally, the study addresses the influence of feedback mechanisms and potential conflicts between majority and minority preferences. In essence, it offers insights into crafting accountable governmental frameworks. We adopt the model by Maskin and Tirole (2004) for our theoretical analysis. There are two periods, 1 and 2. In each period, the authorized policy maker chooses from a pair of possible actions $\{a, b\}$. Even though these actions are given the same labels in both periods for ease of notation, they can be interpreted as distinct actions that are specific to the corresponding period. In each period, all voters share the preference over the two actions conditional on the state of the world, although they do not observe the state of the world. The public derives a payoff of 1 if the action chosen is optimal and a payoff of 0 if the other action is chosen. It is common knowledge that the probability that action a is optimal with probability $p > \frac{1}{2}$ and b is optimal with the complementary probability. Therefore, a is considered the ex ante popular action favoured by the voters, while b is the unpopular option. The equilibrium concept to be used is Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium (PBE).

Voters do not fully observe the state of the world but they do observe the policy maker's chosen action. They potentially also receive signals, including media reports and economic indicators that indicate how the chosen policy performed in the first period.

Following Maskin and Tirole (2004), we consider three forms of government:

- **Direct Democracy**: Voters themselves are authorized to make the policy choice directly.
- **Judicial Power**: A judge is authorized to make the policy choice. A judge is an official who is not elected but appointed and therefore does not have to face the voters at the end of the first period and is automatically appointed for a second term.
- **Representative Democracy**: A politician is authorized to make the policy choice. At the end of the first period, they can be reelected or voted out of office, depending on whether the public views the incumbent politician superior to a potential replacement. The voters base their decisions on their inference about the probability that the incumbent's preferences are aligned with that of the public.

An official authorized to make policy, be it a judge or a politician, may have preferences congruent or incongruent with those of the public. In the former case, they agree with the public about what is the optimal action in each state and in the latter, they disagree with the public. We assume that they are congruent with the voter with probability π and incongruent with the remaining probability. Following Maskin and Tirole (2004), we assume that, unlike the public, an official observes the state of the world. This assumption reflects the reasoning that the official, hired to specifically perform the policy task, has access to the specialized information and a greater incentive to be well-informed.

As is the case of Maskin and Tirole (2004), the welfare of the public under direct democracy can be calculated as follows:

1. **Direct Democracy**: The public chooses the ex ante optimal action a and is indeed optimal with probability p in each period $W^{DD} = 2p$;
2. **Judicial Power**: The judge is authomatically reappointed. In both periods, the judge takes her ideal action, which gives the public a payoff of 1 with probability π. Therefore, the welfare of the public is $W^{JP} = 2\pi$. The probability π is a crucial factor in determining whether politicians act independently or under elite control. Judicial Power yields a welfare level of 2π when it functions independently and correctly implements the optimal policy whenever the politician's preferences align with it.
3. **Representative Democracy**; we introduce a feature that allows us to analyze the effect of godfathers. In particular, in the first period, a politician has a Godfather and is endowed with the Godfather's political preferences. However, once reelected to a second term, the politician may not agree with the Godfather about the optimal policy. The Godfather therefore prefers that the politician take their preferred policy in Period 1. If the politician fails to do so, the Godfather may withdraw his support for the politician.

We introduce a parameter g that measures the influence of the Godfather on politicians which is the main contribution of this paper. We assume that the winning probability of the official is:

- 1 when the official is supported by both the Godfather and the public;

- g when the official is supported by the Godfather but not by the public;
- $1 - g$ when the official is supported by the public but not by the Godfather;
- 0 when the official is not supported either by the public or the Godfather.

Thus, the larger g is, the stronger the influence of the Godfather. The extreme case $g = 0$ corresponds to the Representative Democracy in the original Maskin and Tirole model. The other extreme case $g = 1$ completely negates the public's ability to replace a politician they disapprove.

It is possible that voters receive some feedback about the performance of the policy chosen by the politician. We suppose that before period 2, with probability q, the public learns whether or not the first period was the optimal one. With probability $1-q$, the public learns nothing. Presumably, the public will eventually find out about the optimality of this action, and so q can be thought of as a measure of the speed at which feedback accrues.

Based on the signal they observe (or lack thereof), the public can either reelect the Period 1 incumbent politician or draw a new politician from the pool of candidates (i.e., elect a challenger), who is again congruent with probability π. Because a politician always chooses their preferred action in period 2, the incumbent politician is voted out if

$$\pi^* < \pi \text{ and is kept if } \pi^* \geq \pi, \tag{1}$$

where π^* is the public's inferred probability that the politician is congruent. This implies that the public punishes a politician who is closely aligned with Godfather and chooses action against the public's interest and rewards a politician who chooses an action in the public interest. We start our analysis with the case $q = 0$, which Maskin and Tirole (2004) call the "No Feedback" case. Note that the public only observes what action was chosen, but not about its consequences.

A politician's payoff is assumed to be

- G – from taking their favourite action;
- 0 – from not taking their favourite action;
- R – from holding office.

- **Strong Office-holding motive**:

  We first consider the case where the politician has **strong office-holding motive**: In this situation, the politician values staying in office through period 2 above choosing their ideologically preferred action, which also pacifies their Godfather. In equilibrium, the politician would select the popular action regardless of the arrangement made with the Godfather or what optimal action is. If the politician's chosen action differs from the Godfather's preferred one, the politician loses the backing of the Godfather. This is the case of "full pandering."

  Note that in the full pandering equilibrium, the public only supports the reelection of the politician if the politician chooses a. If the politician chooses action b instead, the public would believe that the politician is incongruent and elect the challenger instead, given that this is a no-feedback case, so the public can only base its decision based on what action the politician chose. Thus, on the equilibrium path, the public's inference about the politician's type is the same as its prior, which makes it indifferent between reelecting the politician and choosing a challenger.

Note that in the no-feedback case, in the full pandering equilibrium, there are four different possibilities in Period 1, depending on whether the politician is congruent and what the optimal action is:

1. Politician is incongruent and observes state of the world a: Politician chooses "b," then stays in power with probability g;
2. Politician is incongruent and observes state of the world b: Politician chooses "a," then stays in power with probability 1;
3. Politician is congruent and observes state of the world a: Politician chooses "a," then stays in power with probability 1;
4. Politician is congruent and observes state of the world b: Politician chooses "b," then stays in power with probability g.

Thus, in the Representative Democracy with Godfathers, the welfare of the public is

$$W^{RD} = \pi p\cdot(1+1)+\pi(1-p)\cdot[0+(1-g)\cdot 1+(g\cdot\pi)]+(1-\pi)p\cdot[1+(1-g)\cdot 0+(g\cdot\pi)]+(1-\pi)(1-p)\cdot(0+0). \tag{2}$$

There can only be a full pandering equilibrium if each type of politician finds in their best interests to choose to pander (and choose action a) in each state of the world. The politician needs to compare the following pairs of payoffs.

1. Congruent politician taking action a (majority-preferred action):
   - Payoff from acting a: $G + \beta(G + R)$
   - Payoff from acting b: $0 + \beta \cdot 0$
2. Congruent politician taking action b (Godfather-preferred action):
   - Payoff from acting a: $0 + \beta(1 - g)(G + R)$
   - Payoff from acting b: $G + \beta g(G + R)$
3. Incongruent politician taking action a (majority-preferred action):
   - Payoff from acting a: $0 + \beta(1 - g)(G + R)$
   - Payoff from acting b: $G + \beta g(G + R)$
4. Incongruent politician taking action b (Godfather-preferred action):
   - Payoff from acting a: $G + \beta(G + R)$

- Payoff from acting b: $0 + \beta \cdot 0$

Note that the first and last comparisons are straightforward. If the politician is congruent and the state is a, then the policy and office-holding motives are consistent with each other. However, in the other two comparisons, these two motives are in conflict. Full pandering is an equilibrium if and only if the office-holding incentive dominates:

$$\beta(1-g)(G+R) \geq G + \beta g(G+R) \;\Rightarrow\; \beta(1-2g)(G+R) \geq G \tag{3}$$

The above inequality if and only if $g < 1/2$ and

$$\frac{\beta(G+R)}{G} \geq \frac{1}{1-2g} \tag{4}$$

For clarity:

$$\beta(G+R) \geq \frac{G}{1-2g} \tag{5}$$

The condition can also be rearranged into:

$$g \leq \frac{1}{2}\left(1 - \frac{G}{\beta(G+R)}\right) \tag{6}$$

Note that it is necessary that

$$G \leq \beta(G+R)$$

There is no pandering if g is too large.

The above condition tells us that in the no feedback case, the politician fully panders when the power of the Godfather's influence is relatively low and the politician's valuation of future office is high enough. If the Godfather's power g is too high, the politician will choose their ideal action in Period 1.

Now, we compare the welfare of the public under direct democracy, judicial power, and Representative Democracy with godfather influence.

- **Weak Office-holding motive**: When the full pandering condition is not satisfied, the politician chooses to honour the preferences of the Godfather in Period 1. This allows the public to draw assumptions about the politician from this choice. The politician would do the bidding of the Godfather in the first period regardless of the possibility of losing the office in the second period. In Nigeria, many politicians do this because they do not want to lose the privileges of being a godson. Also, given that a term is four years in Nigeria, some politicians believe the first period is enough for them, as they can use the connections of the Godfather to climb to a better position.

$$\begin{aligned} W^{RD} = {} & \pi p \cdot (1+1) \\ & + \pi(1-p) \cdot (1 + g \cdot 1 + (1-g) \cdot \pi) \\ & + (1-\pi)p \cdot (0 + g \cdot 0 + (1-g) \cdot \pi) \\ & + (1-\pi)(1-p) \cdot (0+0) \end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

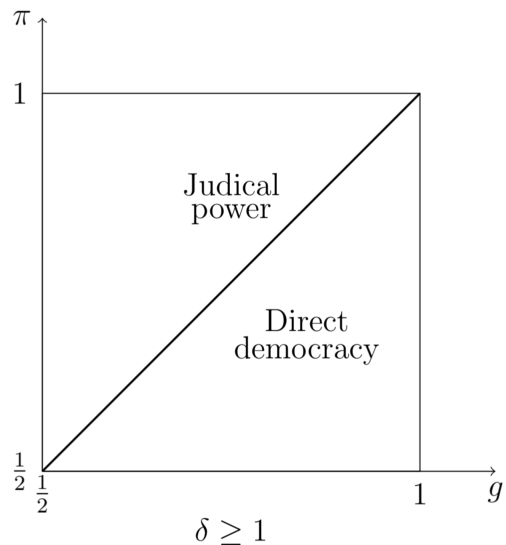

Figure 1: Strong office-holding motive.

A weak office-holding motive makes politicians more likely to serve elites over voters, exit politics for personal gains, and focus on short-term benefits instead of long-term governance. Strengthening electoral accountability is what will allow Representative Democracy strictly dominate Judicial power and Direct democracy.

The welfare of the public under Representative Democracy when the politician has weak office-holding motives is more complex and is deferred to future research.

5.1 Comparison of Welfare of the Public under the Three Political Institutions

In Maskin and Tirole's (2004) model, under strong office-holding motives, Representative Democracy is dominated by either Judicial power or Direct Democracy (see Figure 1). By contrast, under weak office-holding motives, Representative Democracy is optimal because it allows the replacement of non-congruent officials. Where Figures 1 and 2 are excerpts from Maskin and Tirole (2004).

We focus on the setup where the politician has strong office-holding motives, so the politician always panders. In our setup,

$$W^{RD} > W^{JP}$$

if and only if

$$\pi + p + \pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)g - 2\pi = p + \pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)g - \pi > 0 \tag{8}$$

This holds if and only if,

$$g > \frac{\pi - p}{\pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)} \tag{9}$$

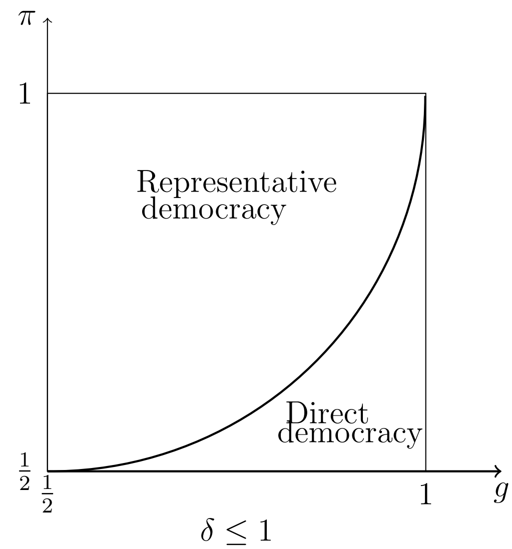

Figure 2: Weak office-holding motive.

Representative Democracy is preferable to Direct Democracy, i.e.,

$$W^{RD} > W^{DD},$$

if and only if

$$\pi + p + \pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)g - 2p > 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \pi - p + \pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)g > 0 \tag{10}$$

or

$$g > \frac{p-\pi}{\pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)}. \tag{11}$$

The special case $g = 0$ corresponds to the original Maskin and Tirole (2004) model. Note that (9) and (11) cannot both be satisfied when $g = 0$. So, Representative Democracy is never optimal under strong office-holding motives. However, it is possible for both (9) and (11) to be satisfied. For example, when $\pi < p$, (9) is automatically satisfied if $g > 0$, and vice versa for (11) when $\pi > p$.

5.2 Numerical Example

Consider the following parameter values:

$$\pi = 2/3, \quad p = 7/10$$

Substituting into (11):

$$g > \frac{7/10 - 2/3}{2/3 \cdot (1-2/3)(2 \cdot 7/10 - 1)} = \frac{3}{8}.$$

The following plot shows how g changes based on different values of p and π.

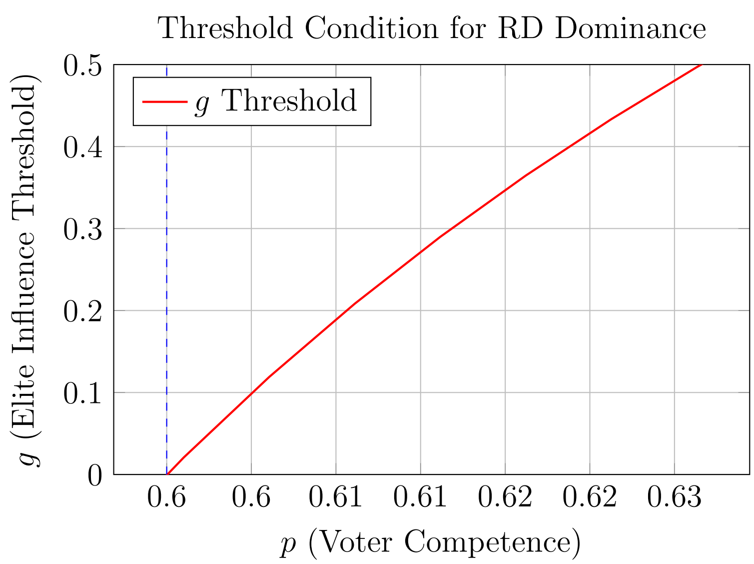

Figure 3: Threshold Condition for g as a Function of Voter Competence p

The example shows that even under strong office-holding motives, as long as the godfather has significant power, it is still possible that Representative Democracy is preferable to the other two institutions. The graph illustrates how g varies based on voter competence (p). According to Maskin and Tirole (2004), the benefit of accountability in a no-feedback case is the possibility of taking out non-congruent officials and this paper agrees that it improves democracy when politicians have a strong office-holding motive.

To summarize:

- Direct Democracy is best if

$$W^{DD} > W^{JP}$$

which means

$$p > \pi \tag{12}$$

In Direct Democracy, policies are chosen directly by the public. If the public is more informed than politicians, then Direct Democracy will result in better policy choices than Judicial Power.

And,

$$W^{DD} > W^{RD}$$

which means

$$g < \frac{p - \pi}{\pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)} \tag{13}$$

If elite influence (g) is high, politicians are more likely to act in the Godfather's interests rather than the public's. Direct Democracy is preferable when the Godfather's influence is high enough to corrupt politicians but low enough that voters can still make informed choices.

- Judicial Power is best if

$$W^{JP} > W^{DD}$$

which means

$$\pi > p \tag{14}$$

This means policy decisions should be left to the independent institutions. Judicial Power is preferable when judicial institutions are more reliable decision-makers than voters

And,

$$W^{JP} > W^{RD}$$

which means

$$g < \frac{\pi - p}{\pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)} \tag{15}$$

Judicial Power is preferable when elite influence on politicians is weak that is (g) is small. Representative Democracy becomes ineffective when Godfather's influence is high, but Judicial Power remains stable as long as it is independent.

- Representative Democracy is best if

$$W^{RD} > W^{DD}$$

which means

$$g > \frac{p - \pi}{\pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)} \tag{16}$$

This condition states that RD dominates DD when the godfather's influence g is high and voter competence p is relatively high. This means Direct Democracy functions best when voters are highly informed. However, if elite influence is significant, RD provides an alternative through elected representatives who may be held accountable by elections.

$$W^{RD} > W^{JP}$$

which means

$$g > \frac{\pi - p}{\pi(1-\pi)(2p-1)} \tag{17}$$

This equation establishes that RD outperforms JP when the godfather's influence g is sufficiently strong and voter competence p is low. Note that equation (15) is a real constraint only if $p > \pi$ and equation (16) is a real constraint only if $\pi > p$, because the expressions on the right hand side of those inequalities would be negative otherwise.

The implication is if voters are poorly informed, Judicial Power may fail to act independently due to elite capture. In this case, Representative Democracy provides a mechanism for electoral discipline, ensuring better governance than JP.

Since W^{RD} depends on π p g, it can vary based on institutional strength and accountability.

6 Conclusion

In this study,we explore the impact of Godfatherism on political decision-making in Nigeria, analyzing how financial contributions and elite influence shape governance. By expanding on the Maskin and Tirole (2004) model, this study illustrates how politicians' actions are influenced by electoral accountability, alignment with public interests, and the role of political sponsors who provide essential financial backing. Our study suggests that political accountability is undermined when elite influence is too strong. If politicians value future office more than immediate rewards, they are likely to pander to public preferences. However, in weak democracies where elite power dominates, Godfathers manipulate the system, making Representative Democracy ineffective. Thus, reducing elite influence through campaign finance reforms or stronger institutions is essential for democracy to function effectively

The key findings are:

- If g which is the influence of the Godfather is large, Representative Democracy can outperform both Judicial Power and Direct Democracy, as elections serve as a constraint on elite dominance.
- If g is too small, Representative Democracy is not optimal because it lacks the ability to counteract the Godfather's influence.
- If voter competence (p) is high, Direct Democracy is effective. However, if p is low, Judicial Power may be preferable unless it is captured by elites.
- A politician fully panders when elite influence g is low and the value of holding office is high. If g is too high, the politician will ignore voter preferences and choose the Godfather's preferred action instead

Thus, Representative Democracy is the best governance system only if electoral accountability is strong enough to counteract the Godfather's influence. Otherwise, Direct Democracy or Judicial Power may yield higher social welfare.

6.1 Policy Recommendations

The economic foundation of Godfatherism lies in elite-controlled institutions, weak enforcement, and voter dependency on patronage. To address these issues, political economy reforms must focus on institutional transparency, voter empowerment, and electoral competition.

1. **Enhancing Electoral Accountability** – Strengthening campaign finance laws and promoting voter education can improve transparency and reduce the dominance of the Godfather.
2. **Restructuring Political Parties** – Encouraging internal democracy within political parties can reduce reliance on Godfather sponsorship and promote merit-based leadership.
3. **Strengthening Institutions** –Granting greater independence to INEC, the judiciary, and anti-corruption agencies will reduce elite manipulation of political processes.

Specifically for Nigeria, reducing the grip of Godfatherism on Nigerian politics requires a multifaceted approach, including institutional reforms, increased political transparency, and informed voter participation. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can progress toward a more accountable and representative democratic system that prioritizes public welfare over elite interests.

6.2 Future Research Opportunities

Further studies could:

- Empirically analyzes the relationship between campaign funding and policy decisions using real-world election data.
- Investigate the role of voter awareness in minimizing elite control over political choices. This study can take into account the feedback case.
- Compare Nigeria's experience with other democracies to identify best practices for reducing Godfather dominance in politics.

7 Use of Generative AI and AI-assisted tools

During the preparation of my thesis, I used ChatGPT to get a better understanding of the theories used in this research and simplify some complex terms. After using this tool, I reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of my thesis.

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