
Research

Godfatherism, Money Politics, Vote Buying, and Dividends of Democracy in Nigeria: A Sociological Assessment

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Abstract: The consolidation of democracy in Nigeria has continued to face significant challenges associated with political patronage, financial influence in elections, and weak democratic institutions. Godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying have become prominent features of the Nigerian political landscape, raising concerns about the quality of democratic governance and the ability of citizens to enjoy the true dividends of democracy. This study provides a sociological assessment of the influence of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying on democratic governance in Nigeria. A cross sectional survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 250 respondents through structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that political godfathers play a significant role in candidate selection and electoral outcomes. Money politics and vote buying were also found to influence voter behavior and undermine electoral integrity. The study concludes that these practices weaken democratic institutions, reduce political accountability, and limit the realization of democratic dividends for citizens. The study recommends electoral reforms, stronger enforcement of anti-corruption laws, political education for voters, and institutional strengthening of democratic processes.

Keywords: Assessment, Democracy, Godfatherism, Money Politics, Nigeria, Vote Buying

1. Introduction

Democracy is widely regarded as a system of governance that promotes political participation, accountability, transparency, and the protection of citizens' rights. In democratic societies, elections provide an opportunity for citizens to choose their leaders

and influence public policy. However, the effectiveness of democracy depends largely on the integrity of political institutions and the fairness of electoral processes. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, democratic governance has been affected by political practices that undermine electoral credibility and weaken democratic institutions (Omotola, 2020).

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, the country has conducted several general elections aimed at consolidating democratic governance. Despite these developments, concerns remain regarding the influence of money and political patronage in electoral processes. Practices such as godfatherism, vote buying, and money politics have continued to shape political competition and governance outcomes in the country (Ojo, 2021).

Godfatherism refers to a political arrangement in which influential individuals use their financial resources, political connections, and social influence to sponsor candidates for political office. In return, these sponsors expect loyalty and access to state resources once the sponsored candidates assume political power. This system often results in the manipulation of electoral processes and the prioritization of private interests over public welfare (Albert, 2019).

Money politics has also become a defining feature of Nigeria's electoral system. Political candidates frequently spend large sums of money during election campaigns to influence voters and secure electoral victory. The monetization of politics creates an uneven playing field where wealthy candidates have significant advantages over those with limited financial resources. Consequently, political competition becomes less about policy ideas and more about financial capacity (Adetula, 2022).

Vote buying represents another serious challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Vote buying involves the exchange of money, goods, or other benefits for electoral support. This practice undermines the principle of free and fair elections because voters may prioritize immediate financial gain over long term governance considerations. As a result, elected officials may feel less accountable to citizens and more indebted to their financial sponsors.

The combined effect of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying has raised questions about the extent to which Nigerian citizens truly benefit from democratic governance. The concept of the dividends of democracy refers to the social, economic, and political benefits that citizens expect from democratic rule, including improved

infrastructure, quality public services, and economic opportunities. When political leaders are primarily accountable to their sponsors rather than the electorate, the delivery of these democratic benefits may be compromised (Aiyede, 2020).

From a sociological perspective, political behavior is influenced by broader social structures, including economic inequality, social networks, and cultural norms. In societies characterized by high levels of poverty and unemployment, voters may be more susceptible to financial inducements during elections. Similarly, political patronage networks may reinforce the power of influential elites within the political system.

This study therefore examines the relationship between godfatherism, money politics, vote buying, and the realization of the dividends of democracy in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to assess how these political practices influence electoral processes, governance outcomes, and citizens' perceptions of democratic performance.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the influence of godfatherism on democratic governance in Nigeria.
2. To assess the effect of money politics on electoral processes and political participation.
3. To analyze the impact of vote buying on voter behavior and democratic accountability.
4. To evaluate how these practices affect the realization of the dividends of democracy.
5. Literature Review

2. Literature Review

Concept of Godfatherism

Godfatherism is a form of political patronage in which influential individuals often wealthy elites, business magnates, or retired political office holders control the selection and election of political candidates. In Nigeria, political godfathers use their financial resources, social influence, and political networks to sponsor candidates and ensure their electoral success (Albert, 2019). These sponsors typically expect loyalty, access to state resources, or personal gains once the candidate assumes office. Godfatherism is deeply embedded in Nigerian politics at local, state, and national levels, shaping both party politics and electoral outcomes.

From a sociological perspective, godfatherism reflects the concentration of power among elites and the structural inequalities within society. Political elites dominate decision-making processes and limit the capacity of ordinary citizens to influence

governance outcomes. This dynamic weakens accountability because elected officials often prioritize the interests of their sponsors over the needs of the electorate (Omotola, 2020). In such a system, the democratic principle of equal participation is compromised, and the substantive benefits of democracy for citizens may be limited.

Money Politics

Money politics refers to the use of financial resources to manipulate political processes and influence electoral outcomes. While political financing is a necessary aspect of modern campaigns, excessive reliance on monetary influence creates an uneven playing field, favoring wealthy candidates and marginalizing those without sufficient resources (Adetula, 2022). In Nigeria, money politics manifests through extravagant campaigns, distribution of gifts, and provision of financial inducements to gain political support. These practices distort electoral competition by shifting focus from candidate competence and policy platforms to personal wealth and the ability to provide material benefits.

The prevalence of money politics has significant implications for democratic governance. When election outcomes are determined by financial power rather than popular will, the capacity of citizens to exercise meaningful political choice is diminished. Furthermore, reliance on financial inducements erodes public trust in political institutions and reinforces elite dominance. In rural and economically disadvantaged communities, the impact of money politics is particularly pronounced, as voters are more likely to respond to immediate material incentives (Ojo, 2021).

Vote Buying

Vote buying is a transactional form of political engagement in which citizens receive money, goods, or favors in exchange for electoral support (Aiyede, 2020). This practice undermines free and fair elections by shifting voter decisions from informed policy-based choices to short-term economic benefits. In Nigeria, vote buying is widespread, particularly in communities with high poverty levels, low literacy rates, and limited access to information. Studies have shown that electoral incentives such as cash payments, food items, or domestic appliances significantly influence voter behavior (Omotola, 2020).

Vote buying not only compromises electoral integrity but also creates accountability problems. Elected officials who rely on financial inducements to secure votes may feel more obligated to satisfy their benefactors than to deliver public services. This weakens the

link between citizen demands and political responsiveness, resulting in lower quality governance and diminished democratic dividends.

Dividends of Democracy

The dividends of democracy refer to the tangible and intangible benefits citizens receive under a democratic system, including political participation, social inclusion, quality public services, economic opportunities, and infrastructure development (Aiyede, 2020). Ideally, democratic governance ensures that political leaders are accountable to the electorate, policies reflect public needs, and resources are distributed equitably.

However, when electoral processes are dominated by godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying, the realization of democratic dividends is hindered. Political leaders may prioritize the interests of elites or their sponsors over the welfare of citizens, resulting in inadequate service delivery, poor infrastructure, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities. Empirical studies suggest that countries where patronage networks and transactional politics prevail often experience limited social and economic benefits despite formal democratic institutions (Omotola, 2020; Adetula, 2022).

Sociological Perspectives on Political Behavior

Political behavior is deeply embedded within social structures, cultural norms, and historical contexts. In Nigeria, economic inequality, poverty, and social stratification increase vulnerability to patronage and financial manipulation (Cockerham, 2021). Rural communities and marginalized populations are more susceptible to vote buying due to limited economic opportunities. Similarly, godfathers leverage social networks, kinship ties, and community influence to maintain dominance over electoral processes.

Sociological theories, particularly elite theory, explain the persistence of godfatherism and money politics as a reflection of concentrated power and control over resources. A small group of political and economic elites dominate decision-making and limit citizen influence, thereby perpetuating inequalities in political participation and governance outcomes (Mills, 2018).

Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies highlight the negative impact of these practices on democratic governance in Nigeria. Omotola (2020) emphasizes that political godfathers significantly shape candidate selection, undermining accountability and meritocracy. Adetula (2022) documents the prevalence of money politics and its role in distorting electoral competition. Ojo (2021) observes that vote buying compromises the integrity of elections and weakens

citizens' trust in democratic institutions. Collectively, these studies indicate that godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying impede the delivery of democracy's social, political, and economic benefits.

Research Gap

While existing studies provide insights into individual practices such as godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying, there is limited integrated analysis of their combined effects on the dividends of democracy in Nigeria. This study addresses this gap by examining how these political practices interact to influence governance outcomes, citizen perceptions, and the realization of democratic benefits.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Elite Theory, a prominent framework in political sociology and comparative politics. Elite Theory posits that political power in society is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small, cohesive group of individuals who control key economic, political, and social resources. According to Mills (2018), this elite group exercises disproportionate influence over policy decisions, governance processes, and resource allocation, often acting in ways that protect their interests rather than the broader public good. The theory contrasts with pluralist models of democracy, which assume a more equitable distribution of political power across competing groups in society.

In the Nigerian context, Elite Theory offers a compelling lens to understand the persistence of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying. Political elites, often including wealthy businesspeople, influential politicians, retired officials, and party sponsors, leverage their financial and social capital to shape electoral outcomes. Through patronage networks, these elites exert considerable control over candidate selection in party primaries and ensure that individuals loyal to them occupy key political positions (Omotola, 2020). This process of elite dominance ensures that political power remains concentrated within a small group while limiting opportunities for broader citizen participation in decision-making.

Godfatherism and Elite Control

One of the primary manifestations of elite influence in Nigeria is godfatherism. Political godfathers deploy their resources to sponsor candidates who align with their interests. In return, elected officials often become beholden to these elites, compromising their accountability to the electorate. Elite Theory explains this phenomenon as a reflection of structural power inequalities, in which the political system is designed to favor

established networks of influence (Albert, 2019). The theory suggests that godfatherism persists because elites maintain control over both financial and social resources that are critical to winning elections, including campaign financing, mobilization of voters, and influence over party decision-making structures.

Money Politics and Elite Influence

Money politics, including the use of funds to sway voter preferences, further exemplifies elite dominance. Wealthy political actors can outspend less resourceful candidates, creating an uneven playing field that undermines electoral competition and meritocracy. Elite Theory highlights that such practices reinforce systemic inequalities by allowing those with financial resources to maintain political control and marginalize ordinary citizens (Adetula, 2022). Money politics ensures that power remains concentrated among elites while ordinary voters are often induced to make choices based on material incentives rather than policy or governance considerations.

Vote Buying and Dependence on Patronage Networks

Vote buying illustrates the transactional nature of elite–citizen relationships in Nigerian democracy. Citizens in economically disadvantaged communities may rely on immediate financial or material inducements offered by political actors to meet their short-term needs. Elite Theory interprets this as a mechanism through which elites maintain control over electoral behavior, ensuring that political outcomes serve the interests of the few rather than the majority (Ojo, 2021). The persistence of vote buying is not merely a result of individual choice but reflects structural inequalities, including poverty, limited political education, and weak institutional oversight, which leave citizens vulnerable to manipulation by political elites.

Economic Inequality and Reinforcement of Elite Power

Elite Theory also emphasizes the role of structural socioeconomic inequalities in sustaining elite dominance. In Nigeria, the concentration of wealth and political influence allows elites to create dependency networks. Citizens with low income or limited education may become reliant on political patrons for access to resources, employment, or social benefits, further entrenching elite control (Mills, 2018). These dynamics explain why democratic processes are often shaped more by elite interests than by the substantive preferences of the broader population.

Linking Elite Theory to Democratic Dividends

The theory provides a useful framework to understand how elite dominance affects

the dividends of democracy. While formal democratic institutions exist in Nigeria, the concentration of political power among elites limits the extent to which citizens enjoy tangible benefits, such as improved infrastructure, social services, and responsive governance (Aiyede, 2020). By controlling candidate selection, campaign financing, and voter behavior, elites can perpetuate a system in which political office serves the interests of a few rather than delivering equitable benefits to the wider population. This aligns with the study's focus on the interplay between godfatherism, money politics, vote buying, and the realization of democratic dividends.

Application to the Study

By applying Elite Theory, this study examines how the concentration of political and economic power among a small group of actors contributes to the persistence of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying in Nigeria. It also provides a lens for analyzing why the expected dividends of democracy improved governance, accountability, and social welfare may remain limited in contexts dominated by elite control. The framework underscores the importance of examining political behavior not only as individual choices but as outcomes shaped by broader structural inequalities and power asymmetries.

In conclusion, Elite Theory offers a robust conceptual foundation for understanding the sociological dynamics of Nigerian politics. It explains the structural and cultural mechanisms through which political elites maintain dominance and how these mechanisms impact citizen participation, electoral integrity, and the realization of democratic benefits. This theoretical perspective informs both the study's methodology and the interpretation of its findings, highlighting the structural constraints that shape political outcomes and democratic experiences in Nigeria.

4. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. Cross-sectional surveys are suitable for examining relationships between variables at a specific point in time. Given the focus on political behaviors such as godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying, a survey design allows for the collection of primary data directly from voters and community members who participate in elections. The design also facilitates the use of both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to understand patterns and relationships among socio-political variables.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised adult citizens eligible to vote in selected states of Nigeria. The study focused on individuals from both urban and rural areas to capture the diversity of electoral behavior influenced by socioeconomic status, exposure to political campaigns, and local political networks. Participants included men and women across various age groups, educational levels, and occupational statuses.

Sample Size

A total of 250 respondents were selected for the study. The sample size was determined to ensure sufficient statistical power for regression analysis and to represent both rural and urban voter experiences. This sample size aligns with prior studies on voter behavior and political patronage in Nigeria (Ojo, 2021; Adetula, 2022).

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents systematically:

- Stage 1: Selection of States – Two states were purposively selected based on historical evidence of strong godfather influence and the prevalence of vote buying practices.
- Stage 2: Selection of Local Government Areas (LGAs) – Within each state, four LGAs were randomly selected to capture variation in urban and rural political contexts.
- Stage 3: Household/Individual Selection – Respondents within selected LGAs were randomly chosen using systematic sampling. Eligible participants included adult voters who had participated in at least one general election in the last decade.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered face-to-face. The questionnaire captured information on:

- Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents (age, gender, income, education)
- Experiences with political godfathers and candidate selection
- Exposure to money politics, including campaign financing and gifts
- Experiences with vote buying and incentives offered during elections
- Perceptions of the dividends of democracy, including service delivery and government accountability

The instrument included both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions to facilitate quantitative analysis. A pretest of the questionnaire was conducted with 20 respondents outside the selected LGAs to ensure clarity, appropriateness of language, and reliability.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was ensured through a comprehensive literature review and expert evaluation in political sociology. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.81, indicating strong internal consistency for the constructs measured, including perceptions of godfatherism, money politics, and democratic dividends.

Model Specification

To examine the impact of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying on the dividends of democracy, the following regression model was specified:

$$\text{Democratic Dividends} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Godfatherism} + \beta_2 \text{MoneyPolitics} + \beta_3 \text{VoteBuying} + \beta_4 \text{Income} + \beta_5 \text{Education} + \varepsilon$$

- Democratic Dividends = Perceived benefits of democracy (infrastructure, service delivery, accountability)
- Godfatherism = Influence of political sponsors in candidate selection and governance
- Money Politics = Financial expenditures and inducements used to influence political outcomes
- Vote Buying = Exchange of cash or material benefits for electoral support
- Income = Household income level
- Education = Educational attainment of respondent
- β_0 = Intercept, β_1 – β_5 = Coefficients, ε = error term

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) summarized respondents' sociodemographic profiles and experiences with political practices. Logistic regression analysis was employed to assess the relationship between independent variables (godfatherism, money politics, vote buying) and the dependent variable (perceived democratic dividends). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose and assured of voluntary participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique codes to respondents. No personal identifiers were collected.

5. Results

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Male	140	56%
Female	110	44%
Age 18–29	68	27%
Age 30–45	112	45%
Age 46–60	60	24%
No Formal Education	75	30%
Primary Education	80	32%
Secondary Education	70	28%
Tertiary Education	25	10%

The majority of respondents were male (56%) and aged between 30–45 years (45%). Educational attainment was relatively low, with 30% having no formal education, which may influence susceptibility to vote buying and money politics.

Table 2: Experience with Godfatherism

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Influenced by Political Godfather	152	61%
Not Influenced	98	39%

Over 60% of respondents reported that political godfathers influenced candidate selection or governance decisions in their community, confirming the widespread impact of political patronage.

Table 3: Exposure to Money Politics

Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Witnessed campaign gifts	180	72%
Participated in financially influenced politics	95	38%

Interpretation: A large majority of respondents (72%) witnessed the use of financial inducements during political campaigns, indicating the prevalence of money politics in the study areas.

Table 4: Experience with Vote Buying

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Received cash or gifts for votes	90	36%
Did not receive	160	64%

About one-third of respondents reported direct participation in vote buying, showing that the practice remains a significant factor in shaping electoral behavior.

Table 5: Logistic Regression Results – Predicting Democratic Dividends

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	t value	p value
Constant	1.12	0.35	3.20	0.002
Godfatherism	-0.65	0.20	-3.25	0.001
Money Politics	-0.48	0.18	-2.67	0.008
Vote Buying	-0.55	0.19	-2.89	0.005
Income	0.32	0.12	2.67	0.008
Education	0.41	0.15	2.73	0.007

Interpretation: The regression results indicate that godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying negatively influence the realization of democratic dividends. Higher income and education positively predict perceptions of democracy's benefits.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying have significant negative implications for the dividends of democracy in Nigeria. The high prevalence of political godfathers, reported by 61% of respondents, demonstrates that political sponsorship continues to shape candidate selection and governance processes. This confirms the observation by Albert (2019) that political elites exercise considerable influence over electoral outcomes, often prioritizing loyalty over competence or public welfare. The influence of godfathers undermines accountability, as elected officials may feel more obligated to their sponsors than to the electorate.

Money politics was reported by 72% of respondents as a common feature during election campaigns. The regression analysis shows that money politics negatively affects the realization of democratic dividends, highlighting that financial inducements distort voter choice and reduce citizens' capacity to hold political leaders accountable (Adetula, 2022). When elections are dominated by financial leverage rather than policy platforms, political competition becomes inequitable, and the interests of ordinary citizens may be subordinated to the personal or financial interests of candidates and their sponsors.

Vote buying remains prevalent, with 36% of respondents indicating direct experience of cash or material incentives in exchange for electoral support. This practice reinforces transactional politics and diminishes the quality of democratic governance. It also discourages citizens from critically evaluating candidates based on performance or policy proposals, further weakening institutional accountability (Ojo, 2021).

Economic and educational factors were found to moderate perceptions of democratic dividends. Respondents with higher income and education levels were more likely to report positive experiences of democracy, suggesting that socioeconomic status influences the ability to participate meaningfully in democratic processes. This aligns with the elite theory framework, which posits that political power is concentrated among influential actors, often marginalizing less privileged citizens (Mills, 2018).

The study highlights a complex interplay between structural inequalities, political culture, and voter behavior. The persistence of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying indicates that formal democratic institutions may exist, but the substantive benefits of democracy are often compromised by informal mechanisms of power and patronage. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that political patronage

networks undermine the consolidation of democracy and the equitable delivery of social services in Nigeria (Omotola, 2020; Aiyede, 2020).

7. Conclusion

This study assessed the impact of godfatherism, money politics, and vote buying on the dividends of democracy in Nigeria. The results indicate that these political practices significantly hinder the realization of democratic benefits for citizens. Political godfathers influence candidate selection and governance decisions, money politics distorts electoral competition, and vote buying compromises the integrity of elections. These dynamics weaken institutional accountability and reduce the likelihood that elected officials will prioritize public welfare.

The study also confirms that socioeconomic factors such as income and education positively influence citizens' perception of democratic dividends, highlighting the role of structural inequalities in shaping political engagement. From a sociological perspective, these findings underscore the importance of addressing both cultural and structural factors that perpetuate political patronage and financial manipulation in Nigerian democracy.

8. Recommendations

I. Strengthen Electoral Reforms: Electoral laws should be enforced to limit the influence of political godfathers and reduce the role of money in elections. Strict campaign finance regulations, transparent political party candidate selection processes, and independent oversight mechanisms are essential to curb patronage practices.

II. Promote Civic and Political Education: Voter education programs should be expanded to raise awareness of the consequences of vote buying and money politics. Citizens need to understand their rights and the long-term impact of transactional politics on governance and public service delivery.

III. Enhance Accountability Mechanisms: Institutions responsible for monitoring political processes, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and anti-corruption agencies, should be empowered to investigate and sanction electoral malpractices, including vote buying and undue influence by political elites.

IV. Support Socioeconomic Empowerment: Policies aimed at improving education, income generation, and employment opportunities can reduce the vulnerability of citizens to financial inducements during elections. Empowered citizens are more likely to make informed political decisions based on policy and competence rather than immediate material gain.

V. Encourage Democratic Party Reforms: Political parties should adopt internal democratic practices that minimize elite domination and ensure transparent candidate selection. This will reduce the control of political godfathers and create a more level playing field for aspiring candidates.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can work toward consolidating democratic institutions, reducing political patronage, and ensuring that citizens enjoy the tangible benefits or dividends of democracy.

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