



## Article

# **Institutional Dynamics of Patronage, Godfatherism, and Executive-Legislative Conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the complex interplay of patronage, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Specifically, it explores how these dynamics shape the distribution of political power, influence decision-making processes, and affect administrative effectiveness. The study adopts an in-depth review method that combines systematic literature analysis with thematic synthesis to explore the institutional dynamics of patronage, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts in Nigeria since inception of this republic. The review method is qualitative in nature and relies on secondary data sourced from credible government documents and the extant literature. The findings revealed that the interplay between patronage politics, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts creates a complex web of challenges that significantly hinder institutional performance in Nigeria. These dynamics do not operate in isolation; instead, they reinforce one another, perpetuating a governance system where personal loyalty, political allegiance, and elite interests take precedence over national development goals and institutional efficiency. The paper proposes deliberate and actionable reforms that strengthen institutional independence and promote mechanism for intra-branch collaboration, while also dismantling the political structures that sustain patronage and godfatherism. Only through such efforts can Nigeria build a resilient public sector capable of advancing national development goals

**Keywords:** Executive-legislative Conflict, Godfatherism, Governance, Institutional Dynamics, Patronage Politics.

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## Introduction

Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic, a period that was widely celebrated as the start of a new political era after decades of military rule. With the adoption of a new constitution and the establishment of democratic institutions, there were high hopes for political stability, good governance, and national development. However, more than two decades later, the optimism that accompanied the transition has been tempered by persistent structural and political challenges. Among the most pressing of these are entrenched patronage networks, the enduring grip of godfatherism, and the frequent conflicts between the executive and legislative arms of government. These issues have not only undermined the consolidation of democratic norms but have also significantly impeded effective governance in the country.

Patronage politics remains a dominant feature of Nigeria's political landscape, where loyalty to political elites is often rewarded with public appointments, contracts, and other benefits, irrespective of merit or qualifications. This practice has fostered a system of rent-seeking, weakened institutional integrity, and diverted public resources from essential developmental priorities (Joseph, 1991; Fagbadebo, 2016; Jombo, 2019). Political office has come to be seen as a means of personal enrichment, reinforcing a culture of impunity and undermining accountability. The reliance on patronage has also contributed to the entrenchment of informal networks of power that operate parallel to, and often in contradiction with, formal state institutions (Kifordu, 2010).

Closely related to patronage is the phenomenon of godfatherism, which involves the control of political office holders by powerful individuals, commonly referred to as "godfathers." These individuals sponsor candidates for political positions with the expectation of wielding influence over government decisions and public resources once their protégés assume office. The influence of godfathers often supersedes constitutional provisions and democratic principles, creating a situation where elected officials are accountable more to their sponsors than to the electorate (Oarhe, 2010). This undermines the autonomy of public institutions and erodes the legitimacy of democratic governance.

The third pillar of this institutional crisis is the persistent conflict between the executive and legislative arms of government. Ideally, a democratic system should be characterized by a harmonious relationship between these branches, anchored on mutual respect, separation of powers, and a shared commitment to national development. In practice, however, Nigeria's executive-legislative relations have been marred by frequent tensions, confrontations, and power struggles. These conflicts often revolve around issues such as budgetary allocations, confirmation of appointments, oversight functions, and

control of party structures. Rather than engaging in constructive dialogue and collaboration, both arms have often resorted to brinkmanship, political maneuvering, and public grandstanding (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2016; Ukase, 2022).

Altogether, the dynamics of patronage, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflict have created a cycle of institutional dysfunction in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Governance has been reduced to a contest of interests between powerful individuals and groups, with little regard for public welfare or institutional development. Policy implementation suffers as political leaders prioritize personal and political survival over long-term developmental goals (Nnadozie, 2023). Meanwhile, public trust in governance structures continues to erode, as citizens perceive the political system as self-serving and disconnected from their needs and aspirations.

A plethora of empirical studies exist on the debilitating effects of patronage, godfatherism and executive-legislative conflicts on Nigeria's presidential democracy in this republic (Akinyemi & Adetula, 2020; Ibeanu & Orji, 2020; Akinola & Uzodike, 2021; Bello & Ahmed, 2021; Nwokedi, 2021; Edeh & Ugwu, 2022; Jombo, 2022). However, most of these studies concentrated more on the interplay of these dynamics at the federal government level with little or no reference to the subnational level, which has recorded some crude manifestations of these maladies. This study is intended to fill this important gap in the literature by exploring the institutional relevance of patronage, godfatherism and executive-legislative conflicts at the state level, while also making passing remarks to the happenings at the national stage.

The paper seeks to examine the intricate and interconnected relationships among these three political practices-patronage, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflict and their impact on governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It explores how these dynamics shape the distribution of political power, influence decision-making processes, and affect administrative effectiveness most especially at the state level. To achieve this onerous task, the paper is organized into five parts. The first part captures the foregoing introduction and the second covers the literature review. The third part discusses the methodology adopted to examine the research problematique. Part four presents the study's results and findings while the fifth part concludes the paper with proposals for strengthening the capacity of the Nigerian state to be able to withstand and manage the devastating impacts of godfatherism and patronage politics as well as promote collaboration and reduce adversarial inter-branch relations.

## **Conceptual Explications and Literature Review**

This section is devoted to providing explanations of major concepts employed in teasing out the main issues relating to the research problematique. Special attention is given to describing the very sense in which concepts such as patronage, godfatherism and executive-legislative conflicts are used in the discourse, particularly their contextual significance to the issues under review. The section also include an interrogation of relevant issues through a review of the extant literature to unpack a complex web of challenges often created by the interplay between patronage politics, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts; and more importantly how these dynamics hinder institutional effectiveness in Nigeria.

### **Patronage Politics and Institutional Weakness**

Patronage politics has remained a dominant force shaping Nigeria's post-independence political architecture, especially in the Fourth Republic. It refers to a system wherein public resources, offices, and opportunities are distributed not based on merit, competence, or due process, but on personal loyalty, ethnic considerations, and political allegiance. This framework perpetuates a neo-patrimonial structure of governance, where informal relationships trump formal institutions, thus eroding administrative efficiency, weakening institutional autonomy, and fostering public distrust. According to Ukase (2022), political godfathers often function as brokers who sponsor candidates into public office with an implicit understanding that loyalty will be rewarded through access to state patronage-ranging from contracts and appointments to budget allocations and political protection. This quid-pro-quo relationship distorts democratic norms, entrenching self-serving elites rather than service-oriented leadership.

The pervasive influence of patronage politics has extended to the bureaucracy and public institutions, leading to systemic politicization of the civil service. Instead of recruiting based on skills, experience, or competitive exams, political loyalty and connections have become prerequisites for appointments and promotions. The outcome is a public service riddled with inefficiency, incompetence, and corruption. Nnadozie (2023) observed that many public agencies in Nigeria suffer from administrative decay due to the imposition of unqualified but politically connected individuals in key roles. These appointees often lack the technical expertise required to formulate or implement evidence-based policies, resulting in haphazard delivery of services, wastage of public funds, and the erosion of institutional credibility.

Moreover, patronage politics perpetuates a culture of impunity. Public officials, once appointed through godfather networks or political cabals, tend to prioritize loyalty to their benefactors over accountability to the public or adherence to institutional ethics (Centre LSD, 2023). This has resulted in the weakening of internal checks and balances within the civil service and broader governance structures. For instance, institutions that are meant to perform oversight-such as anti-corruption agencies or audit bodies-are often undermined or bypassed when politically influential individuals are involved. As Fagbadebo & Ruffin (2022) pointed out, many of Nigeria's governance institutions function more as instruments of political consolidation than as neutral administrators of state affairs, largely due to entrenched patron-client networks.

More so, patronage politics fuels regional and ethnic favoritism in resource allocation and service delivery. Political leaders often prioritize their strongholds or regions where they have electoral or political debts, thereby excluding marginalized communities and exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. In such an environment, the legitimacy of state institutions is questioned, particularly by citizens who feel excluded from state benefits. As highlighted by Abioye & Afolayan (2023), the weakening of institutional autonomy and fairness in state functions significantly lowers public trust in government, leading to civic disengagement, electoral apathy, and in some cases, violent resistance.

Overall, patronage politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has entrenched institutional weakness by distorting recruitment practices, promoting mediocrity, undermining accountability, and reducing the credibility of public institutions.

### **Godfatherism and Democratic Erosion**

Godfatherism, a deeply entrenched feature of Nigeria's political landscape, represents a subset of patronage politics characterized by the dominance of powerful individuals-often wealthy elites or former political officeholders-who sponsor and influence the election of political candidates, referred to as godsons (Oarhe, 2010). These godfathers typically use their wealth, social capital, and political networks to ensure that their chosen candidates win elections, with the expectation that such godsons will remain loyal and grant them undue influence over state resources and decisions once in office. While this practice may offer a shortcut to political power for less-resourced aspirants, it fundamentally undermines the democratic process by sidelining merit, popular will, and accountability (Fagbadebo, 2016; Jombo, 2019 & Van de Wille, 2020).

The implications of godfatherism for Nigeria's democratic development are far-reaching. By determining who gets elected based not on popular support or competence but on allegiance to a political benefactor, godfatherism weakens electoral competition and democratic accountability. Candidates backed by godfathers are often imposed on political parties and constituents, reducing elections to mere formalities rather than genuine expressions of the people's will. This practice not only alienates voters but also discourages capable individuals from participating in politics, further entrenching mediocrity in governance (Jombo & Fagbadebo, 2023). The long-term consequence is the erosion of democratic norms and the consolidation of elite dominance in political decision-making.

More often, the influence of godfathers does not end with the electoral process. Their control often extends into governance, where they exert pressure on elected officials to implement policies that serve their personal or group interests. As a result, public policy becomes skewed toward private gain rather than public good, undermining the principles of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness that are central to democratic governance (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2021; Nnadozie, 2023). In many cases, godsons who attempt to deviate from their godfathers' expectations face political sabotage, threats, or even impeachment, leading to a culture of fear and political subservience. This not only stifles innovation and reform but also creates a system where loyalty to individuals takes precedence over loyalty to the state and its citizens (Ukase, 2022; Sahara Reporters, 2023).

Godfatherism also contributes significantly to political instability and violence in Nigeria. The relationship between godfathers and godsons is often tenuous and fraught with conflict, especially when the latter seek autonomy. Power tussles between godfathers and their political protégés have led to several high-profile disputes that disrupted governance and created uncertainty within state institutions (Fabadebo, 2016; Jombo, 2019; Akinola & Uzodike, 2021). One such example is the prolonged political crisis in Rivers State, where disagreements between political leaders and their godfathers escalated into open confrontation, administrative paralysis, and in some cases, violence (Abioye & Afolayan, 2023; Nnadozie, 2023). These conflicts, which have led to the declaration of 'a state of emergency rule' in the state by the Tinubu-led Federal Government and the subsequent suspension of Governor Fubara from office, not only undermine peace and security but also distract from the pressing developmental needs of the populace. In other words, godfatherism poses a serious threat to Nigeria's democratic development. It distorts electoral processes, compromises good governance, and fuels political instability.

## **Executive-Legislative Conflicts and Governance Challenges**

In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government has been marked by persistent friction and institutional rivalry. Rather than operating as distinct yet collaborative arms of government, both branches often engage in power struggles driven by competing political interests, resource control, and attempts to assert dominance over the policy-making process (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2016; Jombo, 2019). These conflicts frequently result in budget delays, impeachment threats, and legislative gridlocks, thereby impeding the smooth functioning of government and slowing down the implementation of development programs. According to Adeosun (2021), the personalization of political power—where key actors prioritize personal and factional interests over national development—intensifies these tensions and weakens the intended system of checks and balances.

The executive arm, bolstered by vast control over national resources and a broad patronage network, often dominates the legislative branch. This imbalance is evident in the frequent submission of budget proposals that are either significantly altered or delayed by the legislature, leading to extended periods of fiscal uncertainty. In many cases, the legislature is reduced to a rubber stamp, especially when lawmakers prioritize personal political survival over institutional integrity. Edeh & Ugwu. (2022) argue that legislators, in a bid to remain politically relevant or secure re-election, often capitulate to executive pressures, undermining their constitutional mandate to provide oversight and ensure accountability. This erosion of the separation of powers weakens democratic governance and fosters a culture of executive impunity (Premium Times, 2022).

The struggle for dominance also affects the legislative agenda. When executive and legislative leaders belong to different political factions or rival interests within the same party, the legislative process becomes a battleground for political supremacy. Bills sponsored by legislators perceived to be out of favor with the executive may be delayed or rejected, while executive bills are often prioritized regardless of their public value. This selective legislative activity disrupts governance, delays critical reforms, and diminishes public confidence in the capacity of political institutions to deliver tangible development outcomes (Adeosun, 2021; Olasupo, 2012; Ojo, 2021). The consequence is a legislative body that fails to serve as an effective counterweight to executive power.

Another major contributor to executive-legislative conflicts in Nigeria is the absence of internal democracy within political parties. Political godfathers and party elites, who often act as kingmakers, wield excessive influence over both the executive and legislative arms, determining candidates and dictating their political loyalties. This patronage-based control fosters rivalry and instability, as actors

within both arms jostle for favor or seek to resist imposed control. As Edeh & Ugwu (2022) observe, party leaders frequently manipulate intra-party politics, creating factions and promoting discord between elected officials. This contributes to legislative dysfunction and impairs policy coherence and coordination between the branches of government. On a large scale, executive-legislative conflicts in Nigeria represent a serious governance challenge that undermines institutional stability and democratic consolidation.

### **Interplay of Patronage, Godfatherism, and Institutional Performance**

The interplay between patronage politics, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts creates a complex web of challenges that significantly hinder institutional performance in Nigeria. These dynamics do not operate in isolation; instead, they reinforce one another, perpetuating a governance system where personal loyalty, political allegiance, and elite interests take precedence over national development goals and institutional efficiency. In such a context, public administration becomes vulnerable to politicization, with key decisions-ranging from policy formulation to personnel appointments-being influenced more by political patronage than by competence or merit. This undermines the integrity and credibility of public institutions, leading to policy inconsistency, administrative inefficiency, and a general decline in institutional trust (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2012; Fagbadebo & Ruffin, 2022; Nnadozie, 2023).

At the heart of this dynamic is the pervasive culture of godfatherism, where powerful political figures-often former officeholders or wealthy elites-wield significant influence over political actors and public institutions. These godfathers use their networks to secure strategic positions for loyalists within ministries, departments, and agencies, thereby transforming bureaucratic institutions into extensions of political patronage networks (Kifirdu, 2010; Oarhe, 2010). As a result, many civil servants and public officials are beholden to political benefactors rather than the public interest, and this erodes their ability to function independently or objectively. The prioritization of loyalty over competence in recruitment, deployment, and promotion processes fosters inefficiency and mediocrity across the public sector (Nnadozie, 2023).

This system also presents major obstacles to anti-corruption efforts. Patronage networks and godfatherism create a protective shield around public officials who engage in corrupt practices, making it difficult to hold them accountable. Political loyalty becomes a form of immunity, as anti-corruption agencies may be pressured to ignore or suppress investigations involving politically connected individuals. According to Ezeibe & Oguonu (2021), this dynamic compromises the autonomy of



institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), which are often politicized or under-resourced. Consequently, the fight against corruption becomes selective, inconsistent, and ineffective, which further diminishing public confidence in state institutions.

Moreover, the persistent power struggles between the executive and legislative arms of government, often influenced by patronage politics, disrupt institutional coordination and delay the implementation of critical policies. When legislative oversight is weakened due to political alliances or patronage-based alignments, the executive is left unchecked, resulting in unilateral decisions that may not reflect broader national interests. In such environments, institutional performance suffers, as governance becomes reactive rather than strategic. This ultimately hampers the capacity of the Nigerian state to deliver essential services, enforce the rule of law, and promote socio-economic development (Jombo & Fagbadebo, 2019; Abioye & Afolayan, 2023).

On the whole, the interwoven nature of patronage, godfatherism, and institutional dysfunction poses a fundamental threat to good governance in Nigeria. These issues continue to reduce the effectiveness of public institutions, entrench corruption, and weaken democratic accountability.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts an in-depth review method that combines systematic literature analysis with thematic synthesis to explore the institutional dynamics of patronage, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The review method is qualitative in nature and relies primarily on data sourced from credible secondary sources. This in-depth approach ensures that both the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of institutional dysfunction are critically examined, offering insights that are relevant for both academic research and policy reform.

The review process involved three key stages: identification of relevant sources, screening and selection based on thematic relevance and methodological rigor, and extraction and synthesis of core arguments. A thematic coding framework was employed to organize the data into major themes including patronage politics, godfatherism, executive-legislative power dynamics, institutional erosion, and governance challenges. This enabled a deeper understanding of how these elements interconnect and affect institutional performance. It went beyond descriptive accounts to providing a comprehensive analytical narrative that captures the complexities of Nigeria's political governance.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of this in-depth review highlight the persistent influence of patronage politics, the pervasive role of godfatherism, and the recurring tensions between the executive and legislative branches as defining features of Nigeria's democratic experience in the Fourth Republic. These interrelated phenomena are not isolated occurrences but rather symptomatic of deeper institutional dysfunctions that compromise democratic consolidation, governance efficiency, and public sector accountability culminating into policy inconsistencies and burgeoning governance crisis.

### The Entrenchment of Patronage Politics and Institutional Distortion

Patronage politics has become deeply embedded in Nigeria's political architecture, shaping not only electoral outcomes but also public institutions and governance practices. The review revealed that political appointments, contract awards, and bureaucratic postings are often influenced more by loyalty and partisan alignment than by merit or institutional need (ICG, 2021; CDD, 2022; Centre LSD, 2023). Patron-client relationships, fostered during election cycles, are sustained through the strategic distribution of state resources as rewards for political support. This practice undermines institutional autonomy and erodes the professional ethos of the civil service.

In the Nigerian context, patronage serves both a political and survival function for elected officials. It helps to consolidate support within ruling coalitions and ensures elite cohesion. However, it also produces negative externalities for institutional performance. Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) are often populated with politically loyal but technically deficient personnel who prioritize the interests of their patrons over the mandates of their offices (Ibeanu & Orji, 2020; Fagbadebo & Ruffin, 2022). This compromises service delivery, distorts policy priorities, and leads to inefficiencies in public administration.

The literature underscores how patronage politics thrives in weak institutional environments where rules are flexible, enforcement is selective, and accountability mechanisms are either compromised or non-existent. Nigeria's oversight institutions, including the Public Complaints Commission, the Code of Conduct Bureau, and even the legislature itself, have struggled to act as effective checks on executive discretion and patronage abuse. As the review indicates, this has led to a political culture where institutional subservience is normalized, and public sector governance is rendered vulnerable to elite manipulation.

## **Godfatherism as an Informal Institution of Power**

Closely tied to the practice of patronage is the phenomenon of godfatherism, which has gained prominence as a parallel, informal institution of power in Nigeria's democratic experiment. Political godfathers, typically wealthy and influential elites, exercise considerable influence over candidate selection, electoral processes, and post-election governance. The study found that godfatherism operates as an extra-constitutional layer of political authority that compromises democratic norms and institutional independence.

Several documented instances across the Fourth Republic highlight how godfathers use their financial resources and strategic positioning to install loyalists into key political positions. Once in office, these political "godsons" are expected to serve the private interests of their benefactors, often at the expense of public interest. This dynamic has been evident in multiple states-such as in the cases of the Obasanjo-Atiku split, the Saraki dynasty in Kwara, and the Oshiomhole-Obaseki conflict in Edo and more recently the Wike-Fubara debacle in Rivers-where attempts to assert political independence by elected officials were met with fierce resistance from their political sponsors.

This form of political clientelism erodes the autonomy of public officials and distorts democratic accountability. Rather than being accountable to the electorate, public officeholders become beholden to their sponsors, leading to governance decisions that reflect narrow elite interests. In addition, the entrenchment of godfatherism has further deepened electoral violence, voter manipulation, and political instability, as rival elites deploy state and non-state instruments to protect or reclaim political territories.

The findings align with institutional theories that emphasize the role of informal norms and networks in shaping political behavior and governance outcomes. In Nigeria, godfatherism has effectively redefined the parameters of institutional power, embedding informal authority within formal political structures (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2021; Edeh & Ugwu, 2022; NDI, 2020). This has not only weakened democratic institutions but also created dual centers of power that often conflict with each other, further complicating policy implementation and governance.

## **Executive-Legislative Conflicts and the Crisis of Institutional Cooperation**

One of the most salient findings of this review is the recurrent and often debilitating conflict between Nigeria's executive and legislative arms. From the early days of the Fourth Republic, executive-legislative relations have been marked by power struggles, mutual distrust, and political brinkmanship

(Fatile & Adejuwon, 2016; Jombo, 2019). These conflicts have manifested in budget delays, oversight confrontations, legislative resistance to executive nominees, and in some cases, impeachment threats.

While some level of tension is inherent in a presidential system with separation of powers, the intensity and frequency of conflicts in Nigeria suggest a deeper institutional malaise. The review shows that many of these confrontations are driven not by ideological differences or policy disagreements but by contestations over control of patronage channels, budget allocations, and influence over state resources. This instrumentalist approach to power has converted the legislature into a battleground for competing elite interests, thereby undermining its core function of lawmaking and oversight.

Several notable examples demonstrate the disruptive effects of these conflicts. The Obasanjo-Na'Abba standoff led to multiple budget delays and legislative walkouts. The Yar'Adua administration faced friction over constitutional interpretation and fiscal federalism. The Jonathan era was marked by a deepening rift with Speaker Aminu Tambuwal, while the Buhari-Saraki conflict symbolized the apex of partisan polarization within the legislature (Jombo, 2022). Instructively, each episode of these face-offs revealed how fragile the framework of intergovernmental collaboration remains in Nigeria, especially when political alignment between the arms of government is absent.

Over the years, the legislature has often been portrayed as either too confrontational or too compliant, depending on the political context. During periods of strong executive dominance, the National Assembly has been relegated to a rubber-stamp institution. At other times, particularly when led by assertive leaders, it has exercised its powers in ways that appear more politically motivated than institutionally grounded. This pendulum reflects the absence of a stable institutional culture that supports constructive engagement and mutual respect between arms of government.

More so, there have been many occasions where executive's control over the purse and security apparatus has been used to exert pressure on the legislature, curbing its independence. On the other hand, legislators have been known to inflate budgets and demand constituency projects in exchange for political cooperation. These transactional dynamics weaken public institutions and divert attention from citizen-centered governance to elite-centered bargaining.

### **Institutional Implications and Broader Governance Challenges**

The intersection of patronage politics, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts has profound implications for institutional development and democratic governance in Nigeria. These practices have weakened the formal rules of engagement, normalized informal arrangements, and

entrenched elite domination over public resources and policymaking processes. As the review demonstrates, institutions that ought to serve as neutral arbiters of democratic values have been co-opted into political struggles, thereby undermining their credibility and functionality.

The consequences are evident in Nigeria's governance trajectory. Public confidence in state institutions remains low, policy implementation is frequently obstructed by political interference, and accountability mechanisms are ineffective or politically compromised. The politicization of the civil service, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies further reinforces the institutional fragility that enables these undemocratic practices to thrive

Moreover, the persistence of these dynamics has constrained efforts at public sector reform and democratic consolidation. While successive administrations have initiated programs aimed at strengthening institutions-such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and the Open Government Partnership (OGP)-these reforms often face resistance from entrenched interests that benefit from the status quo (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2021; Adeogun, 2021; Nwokedi, 2021; Nnadozie, 2023).

The findings also suggest that the political elite's reluctance to adhere to the principles of separation of powers and institutional accountability poses a significant threat to democratic sustainability. Without a deliberate effort to restructure elite incentives and enforce institutional checks and balances, governance will continue to be characterized by instability, inefficiency, and elite capture.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The analysis of patronage politics, godfatherism, and executive-legislative conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic reveals a troubling pattern of institutional distortion, elite domination, and governance inefficiency. While Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 marked a significant political milestone, the promise of democratic consolidation has been significantly undermined by informal political practices that weaken institutional structures and obstruct developmental goals. Patronage and godfatherism have entrenched elite control over public resources, subverted democratic accountability, and prioritized personal loyalty over merit in public administration. Likewise, recurrent conflicts between the executive and legislative arms have compromised the effectiveness of governance, disrupted policy implementation, and eroded public trust in state institutions.

The interplay between formal institutions and informal political practices has produced a hybrid governance environment, where rules are selectively applied and power is often negotiated outside

institutional frameworks. This dynamic has not only stifled the professionalization of the civil service but has also weakened the legitimacy of democratic processes. The review underscores that these challenges are not simply the result of personal failings of political actors, but are deeply embedded in the structure of political incentives, the fragility of oversight mechanisms, and the weakness of institutional autonomy.

Arising from the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are proposed for immediate actions to facilitate convergence between formal and informal political institutions. The first step is to strengthen the independence and capacity of democratic institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and civil service commissions. Institutional autonomy can only be achieved when these bodies are insulated from political interference and empowered to perform their functions without fear or favour.

Moving forward also require political party reform, which is essential to curtailing the influence of godfatherism and foster internal democracy. The dominance of political godfathers is largely facilitated by the absence of transparent party structures and the monetization of the political process. Strengthening internal party democracy, enforcing campaign finance regulations, and promoting issue-based politics are critical steps toward reducing elite capture of the political system.

Over the years, the public service in Nigeria has been over-politicized with increasing partisanship and patronage. There is need for current reforms to prioritize the professionalization and depoliticization of the public service. Public appointments should be based on merit, transparency, and institutional need rather than political loyalty. Also, efforts should be made to create institutional safeguards in order to protect civil servants from political manipulation thereby restoring the integrity and efficiency of public service delivery.

Overall, there is urgent need to accentuate and institutionalize mechanisms for constructive executive-legislative engagement in order to reduce the incessant face-offs between the two branches. Adopting periodic intergovernmental dialogues and resorting to formal dispute resolution frameworks in times of disagreements harbours innumerable potentials for promoting collaboration and reducing the adversarial nature of inter-branch relations. In all of these, the role of civil society, media, and academia in promoting institutional integrity and democratic accountability cannot be overemphasized. These actors must continue to expose anti-democratic practices, advocate for reform, and build public pressure for institutional accountability. These measures should be complemented by civic education campaigns that empower citizens to demand accountability and transparency from their elected representatives.

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