

I- Theory

Environment

Consider an economy with two sectors: a *public sector*, which offers relatively stable employment and wages, and a *private sector*, which includes wage employment and entrepreneurship but entails higher income risk. Individuals must choose an **education level** and, later, a *career path*. Labor-market outcomes depend on individual ability and educational attainment. However, *political connections* can facilitate access to public-sector jobs by lowering hiring frictions or relaxing merit-based requirements or competitive examination.

Children make schooling and effort decisions under the guidance of parents, who invest in education and monitor school participation. Parents and children form expectations about the returns to education, career path, and effort based on perceived labor-market opportunities.

Political Connections as Labor-Market Insurance

Let political connections act as an *insurance mechanism* that increases the probability of securing a public-sector job independently of academic performance. For connected households, the expected payoff to public-sector employment is higher and less uncertain than for unconnected households. Formally, political connections reduce the variance and lower the effective cost of job search in the public sector.

This insurance effect alters incentives along two margins:

1. **Career Choice Margin:** Anticipating preferential access to public employment, connected individuals optimally select careers for which connections are most valuable—namely, public-sector jobs—rather than private-sector or entrepreneurial paths where connections yield fewer benefits.
2. **Human Capital Investment Margin:** Because connections partially substitute for merit, the *marginal return to academic effort and performance declines*, even as the return to remaining enrolled in school remains positive.

Parental Investment and Educational Targeting

Parents choose educational investments (e.g., tutoring, monitoring) to maximize their child's expected lifetime utility. In unconnected households, future job prospects depend heavily on academic performance, leading parents to invest strongly in effort-enhancing inputs and closely monitor schooling.

In connected households, however, parents anticipate that political connections will secure access to public-sector employment once the child attains *minimum credential thresholds* (e.g., secondary or tertiary degree required for civil service). As a result, parents rationally *target educational investments toward credential completion rather than performance maximization*. This leads to lower dropout risk but weaker incentives for high academic effort.

Implications for Children's Behavior and Aspirations

Children internalize parental beliefs and expectations. For children, political connections reduce uncertainty about employment conditional on credential attainment, leading to:

- Greater preference for public-sector careers;
- Lower inclination toward private sector jobs and especially entrepreneurship, which remains risky;
- Sustained educational aspirations aimed at meeting credential requirements;
- Reduced dropout likelihood, but potentially lower effort conditional on enrollment.

Thus, political connections generate a distinctive pattern: *high educational persistence combined with effort reallocation and career channeling*.

II- Hypotheses

Parents

H1 (Educational Investment): Parents exposed to the political-connection vignette will *invest as much as control parents in children education*, even if academic effort is lower (e.g., tutoring, monitoring).

H2 (Career orientation): Parents exposed to political connection vignette will *report strong preferences to public sector jobs*, relative to control parents.

H3 (Dropout Insurance): Politically connected parents will report *stronger incentives to keep children enrolled*, even if academic effort is lower.

H4 (Credential Targeting): Connected parents will aspire to *education levels sufficient for public-sector entry*, rather than maximizing academic excellence per se.

Children

H4 (Career Channeling): Children exposed to the political-connection vignette will be *more likely to prefer public-sector careers and less likely to prefer entrepreneurship*.

H5 (Effort Reallocation): Connected children will report *lower academic effort* conditional on enrollment, reflecting reduced reliance on merit.

H6 (Aspirations with Retention): Connected children will report *higher degree aspirations and lower dropout likelihood*, despite weaker incentives for high performance.

III- Survey Experiments

Assignment Mechanism

The assignment mechanism relies on *birth month* of the *household head* (HH). **Any HH who is born in an even month (February, April, June, August, October, December) is assigned to treatment group and control group otherwise.** Because we have twelve months in the year with equally distributed even and odd months, respondents have an equal probability of 0.5 to be assigned to either study group. **A student above 14 years old in the household is randomly selected if they are many and is systematically assigned to their HH's respondent study condition.** In other words, if HH is born in January, they will be assigned to control, which would also be the student study group.

Parents

Vignettes

Control: Consider your child is in the final years of secondary school and is thinking about their future in a country like Benin. Your family must decide how much to invest in the child's education (fees, tutoring, monitoring, and time). Obtaining a job in the future depends on school performance, degree, and competitive examination (**not connected**). Your child's grades are below average (**Low performance**).

Treatment: Consider your child is in the final years of secondary school and is thinking about their future in a country like Benin. Your family must decide how much to invest in the child's education (fees, tutoring, monitoring, and time). Obtaining a job in the future depends on school performance, degree, and competitive examination. **You (or your spouse) have political networks and personally know reliable political officials who can help with your child's search for job (Connected).** Your child's grades are below average (**Low performance**).

Attention Check

1. In the scenario, do you or your spouse have strong political connections?
 - Yes
 - No
2. In the scenario, is your child a high or low academic performer?
 - High
 - Low

Manipulation Check

Perceived Job Advantage

1. In the situation I just described, how easy would it be for the child to obtain a public-sector job in the future?
 - Very difficult
 - Somewhat difficult
 - Somewhat easy
 - Very easy

Importance of School Performance

2. In this situation, how important is the child's school performance for getting a good job in the future?
 - Not important
 - Somewhat important
 - Very important

Source of Job Security

3. In this situation, what matters more for the child's future job?
 - Education and exam results
 - Family connections
 - Both equally

Expectation: Treated parents should perceive **higher job access** and **lower marginal importance of grades**, while still recognizing schooling as relevant.

Parent Outcomes

A. Education investment (primary outcomes)

1. *Which of the following would you do in the next 6–12 months? (select all that apply)*
 - Pay for tutoring/extra classes
 - Pay for exam prep materials/classes
 - Pay school fees earlier / in full
 - Reduce child's household chores to free study time
 - Encourage child to pursue higher education (college/technical)
 - Encourage child to start working sooner instead of further schooling
 - None of the above

B. Budget allocation (behavioral measure)

2. *Suppose you had an extra 100 units of money (in CFA). How would you allocate it?*
 - Tutoring/extra classes: ____
 - Exam fees/materials: ____
 - Transportation to school: ____
 - Savings/other household needs: ____

C. Career encouragement (secondary outcome aligned with student side)

3. *Which option would you most encourage your child to pursue?*
 - Public-sector career track

- Private-sector career track
- Entrepreneurship
- Not sure

D. Beliefs about returns and uncertainty (mechanism)

4. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is no chance and 100 is certainty: *What are the chances that your child gets a job after graduation?*
 - In the public sector? _____
 - In the private sector? _____
5. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is no cost and 100 is highest cost: *What is the expected job-search costs for your child?*
 - In the public sector?
 - In the private sector?

Students

Vignettes

Control: Consider a student like you, in your final years of secondary school in a country like Benin. The student is thinking about what to do after graduation: (A) prepare for a public-sector job, (B) look for a job in a private company, (C) switch to vocational training, or (D) start a small business. Getting a job in any sectors depends upon your school performance or you passing an exam (**not connected**). The student’s grades are below average (**Low performance**).

Treatment: Consider a student like you, in your final years of secondary school in a country like Benin. The student is thinking about what to do after graduation: (A) prepare for a public-sector job, (B) look for a job in a private company, (C) switch to vocational training, or (D) start a small business. Getting a job in any sectors depends upon your school performance or you passing an exam. **The student’s parents have connections to political officials or members of the government (Connected)**. The student’s grades are below average (**Low performance**).

Attention Check

3. In the scenario, does the student’s family have political connections?
 - Yes
 - No
4. In the scenario, is the student a high or low academic performer?
 - High
 - Low

Manipulation Check

Expected Help with Jobs

1. In this situation, do you think your family could help you get a public-sector job?
 - No
 - Maybe
 - Yes

Role of School Effort

2. In this situation, how important is working hard in school for getting a good job?
 - Not important
 - Somewhat important
 - Very important

Job Competition Beliefs

3. In this situation, how hard do you think it is for most people to get a government job?"
 - Very hard
 - Somewhat hard
 - Not hard

Expectation: Treated children should report **higher perceived family help** and **lower perceived job competition**, conditional on schooling.

Student Outcomes

A. Career preference (primary outcome)

1. *If you were this student, which path would you choose?*
 - Public-sector job track
 - Private-sector job track
 - Start a business/entrepreneurship
 - Vocational Training
 - Not sure

B. Effort/achievement intentions (mechanism)

2. *How likely is the student to increase study effort to improve grades to achieve the minimum required qualification?*
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neither likely nor unlikely
 - Likely
 - Very likely
3. *If the student struggles, how likely is the student to:*
 - Attend extra classes / tutoring
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neither likely nor unlikely
 - Likely
 - Very likely
 - Re-take exams if needed
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neither likely nor unlikely
 - Likely
 - Very likely
 - Reduce leisure time to study
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neither likely nor unlikely
 - Likely
 - Very likely

C. Beliefs about job probability, time, and costs (mechanism)

6. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is no chance and 100 is certainty: *What are the chances that your child gets a job after graduation?*
 - In the public sector?

- In the private sector?
7. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is no cost and 100 is highest cost: *What is the expected job-search costs for your child?*
- In the public sector?
 - In the private sector?

D. Normative/attitudinal secondary outcomes (Separate “preference” and “approval.”)

5. *How fair is the hiring process in the public sector*

- Very unfair
- Unfair
- Neither fair nor unfair
- Fair
- Very fair