

A Critical-Hermeneutic Analysis of Shadow Politics Representation in the Godfather Trilogy

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Feb, 2026

Revised Feb, 2026

Accepted Feb, 2026

Keywords:

Narrative Hermeneutics;
Political Communication;
Shadow Politics;
The Godfather Trilogy;
Transitional Democracy

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of shadow politics in The Godfather trilogy using a critical-hermeneutic approach grounded in Paul Ricoeur's narrative theory of Mimesis I-III. Shadow politics is conceptualized as informal power practices operating outside formal state institutions yet significantly shaping political decisions, legitimacy, and resource distribution. Employing qualitative narrative analysis, this study analyzes selected scenes, dialogues, and visual symbols from The Godfather (1972), The Godfather Part II (1974), and The Godfather Part III (1990) as political communication texts. Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model, complemented by Lasswell's political communication framework to map actors, messages, channels, and effects within shadow power dynamics. The findings reveal that the mafia in the trilogy functions as a non-state political actor that substitutes and penetrates state functions, including justice, security, economic regulation, diplomacy, and leadership succession. Through Mimesis II, the films configure a parallel governance system sustained by patronage, loyalty, symbolic legitimacy, and controlled violence, while Mimesis III demonstrates how audiences may normalize or legitimize such informal power structures. Reflecting on the Indonesian political context after the 2024 elections, this study argues that The Godfather offers a critical lens to understand contemporary shadow political communication in transitional democracies, where procedural legality coexists with elite-driven informal decision-making. The study contributes conceptually by proposing the notion of shadow logic as a shared mindset underlying both criminal and formal political actors, enriching political communication and film studies by positioning cinema as a laboratory for critical analysis of power beyond formal institutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern politics does not only take place in formal spaces such as parliament, bureaucracy, or the legal system. Behind these official mechanisms, there are informal channels that often determine the direction of

state policy. This phenomenon of power relations outside state institutions is known in political literature as shadow politics. Shadow politics refers to the exercise of power outside the state's legal procedures, but which still has a significant impact on decision-making and resource distribution [1]. These shadow

politics practices can take many forms, depending on the context of a country's political system and history. The manifestations of shadow politics are largely determined by the structure and dynamics of the regime in each country. In mature democracies such as the United States and Western Europe, shadow politics often takes the form of political lobbying, campaign financing, and regulatory capture, which is a condition in which public policy is controlled by corporate interests through legal political channels [2]. Although procedurally legal, the substance of this practice reveals the dominance of informal power over democratic processes. Meanwhile, in countries transitioning to democracy, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, shadow politics is more transparent and cruder. Phenomena such as political dynasties, media ownership concentration, electoral patronage, and economic oligarchy reveal the fragility of legal institutions, allowing informal actors to penetrate and dominate state structures [3]. In comparison, in authoritarian regimes, shadow politics tends to be integrated with the state's repressive apparatus. Studies in Latin America, Belarus, and Myanmar, for example, confirm how closely informal networks are woven into the structure of state power, giving rise to a hybrid pattern of formal and shadow power [4].

The phenomenon of shadow politics in Indonesia has become increasingly apparent in cases that have received national attention, such as the fictitious Telkom project (2016-2018), which caused the state to lose more than Rp 400 billion, and the corruption scandal at the state-owned company Pertamina related to oil import management and price mark-ups, which allegedly caused the state to lose more than Rp 190 trillion (Detik.com, 2025; Tempo, 2025; CNN Indonesia, 2025; FIA UI, 2025). In addition, shadow politics is also evident in transnational crime, such as online gambling networks involving officials and influencing formal policy-making, as revealed by Tempo's investigative report (2025) on the relationship between online gambling in Cambodia and

the Indonesian political elite. Reactions to this report, such as cyber-attacks on the Tempo portal, show how sensitive the exposure of informal power networks and shadow politics in the digital public sphere is (Tempo, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). This reinforces that shadow politics in Indonesia is not just an assumptive issue, but a reality that operates through communication, intimidation, and alliances between illegal actors and formal political structures.

In addition to transnational crime, the role of the media oligarchy in Indonesia further reinforces the position of shadow politics in national political life. The centralized ownership of information channels by elite groups with direct political affiliations has become an effective instrument for consolidating power and controlling the flow of public information, especially ahead of the 2024 elections (Internews, 2024; PR2Media, 2024). In the context of electoral politics, recent research confirms that political dynasties and oligarchies increasingly dominate the democratic arena after the 2024 elections, which has narrowed the space for political competition and strengthened patronage ties [5]. This data shows that shadow politics is deeply rooted in Indonesia's transitional democracy, far from being merely a fictional shadow. This phenomenon is also reflected in the mafia figures who act as political actors outside the formal state structure. The mafia is no longer perceived only as perpetrators of criminal acts, but has constructed a counter-power system with strategic functions similar to those of political institutions. They have built hierarchies, command structures, patronage mechanisms, and resource distribution systems that parallel those of the formal state. In practice, the mafia plays a significant role in territorial control, conflict negotiation, and underground economy management, vital functions of the state that have been taken over by these informal institutions.

The reciprocal relationship between the state and the mafia has even created a condition of a 'state in the shadow of the mafia', where formal power receives

protection and benefits from cooperation with these informal forces. The research questions in this study are formulated to clarify the focus of the study based on the phenomena, theories, and context that have been described. Referring to Paul Ricoeur's framework of mimesis and the dynamics of shadow political narratives in *The Godfather*, as well as its relevance to Indonesian political communication after the 2024 elections, the research questions to be answered are: 1) What was the social reality of American society in 1940–1970? 2) How is shadow politics represented in *The Godfather*? 3) How can shadow politics in the film be understood in the context of contemporary Indonesian politics? This study focuses on mapping the narrative structure, analyzing the role of the mafia as a shadow political actor, synthesizing a typology of shadow political communication across regimes, and reflecting on the political context of Indonesia after the 2024 elections, while maintaining broader scientific relevance. The objectives of this study are to examine the phenomena formulated in the research questions, namely: 1) To identify the elements of Mimesis I (prefiguration) that support the representation of shadow politics in *The Godfather*; 2) Analyzing the structure of Mimesis II (configuration), including the plot, character roles, conflicts, and narrative symbols as mafia power communication strategies; 3) Interpreting Mimesis III (refiguration), namely how audiences interpret the legitimacy and normalization of shadow politics through film narratives; 4) Synthesizing the typology of shadow politics communication within the framework of cross-system governance (mature democracy, transitional democracy, authoritarianism); 5) Reflecting on the normative-critical implications of shadow politics in the context of Indonesia's transitional democracy, particularly in relation to political dynasties, media oligarchy, electoral patronage, online gambling, and state capture practices in strategic state-owned enterprises.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework of this study integrates Paul Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics through Mimesis I–III—prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration—to ensure coherence between data, theory, and reflection in analyzing *The Godfather* as a political narrative [6], [7], [8]. Analytical rigor is maintained through transparent coding and operationalization based on Miles and Huberman's qualitative analysis model [9], complemented by Lasswell's political communication formula to classify actors, messages, channels, and effects, particularly at the stages of Mimesis II and III [10]. Existing literature interprets *The Godfather* as an allegory of capitalism, masculinity, moral conflict, and power from sociological, semiotic, philosophical, and psychoanalytic perspectives across Western and Asian contexts [11], [12], [13], while studies on shadow politics emphasize informal power practices such as patronage, elite collusion, and state or regulatory capture in transitional democracies [1], [4], [14], [15]. However, no prior research has systematically combined Ricoeur's Mimesis framework, Lasswell's political communication model, and Miles and Huberman's analytical procedure to construct a typology of shadow political communication and reflect on Indonesian politics after the 2024 elections, a gap this study addresses by positioning film as a laboratory for critical socio-political analysis [6].

2.2 *Shadow Politics*

Shadow politics refers to informal power practices that shape policy, legitimacy, and resource distribution outside formal state procedures, operating through illegal and quasi-legal mechanisms such as patronage, lobbying, and regulatory collusion. The literature links this phenomenon to oligarchy and elite wealth defense [1], [3], as well as state and regulatory capture [16], [17], [18], positioning it on a spectrum from

criminal mafias to co-opted formal institutions, with evidence of its diffusion across both transitional and established democracies [19]. In this study, shadow politics is conceptualized as external influence by non-state actors and internal misuse of authority by state actors [16], [20], [21], aligning with arguments that elites instrumentalize the state to expand wealth [3] and that weakened accountability in delegative democracies enables leaders to act as if holding unlimited mandates [22].

2.3 *Film as a Text of Political Communication*

Film is not merely entertainment but a key arena for producing political meaning, as mass media shape public perceptions of social reality and power relations and function as “political texts” that articulate ideology, legitimacy, and power through narrative [8], [23]. Comparative research shows that variations in political communication across regimes are often expressed through media, especially in democratic transitions where informal communication becomes central to struggles over legitimacy [14], [24], a dynamic further amplified by digital media that expand non-institutional power channels [25]. Within this framework, The Godfather trilogy serves as a narrative laboratory for analyzing shadow political communication, as its

symbolism of conflict, patronage, and power strategies reflects informal politics and contemporary political realities.

2.4 *Terminology used*

This study draws on several key concepts to frame its analysis of informal power. Delegative Democracy describes fragile democratic systems in which leaders act as if endowed with unlimited authority amid weak accountability [22], while Hidden Transcripts refer to covert communications and symbolic practices operating behind formal power [26]. Informal domination of institutions is captured through State Capture and Regulatory Capture, where policies and regulators serve private or corporate interests [16], [17], [18]. These dynamics are reinforced by Quiet Politics, which operates discreetly yet decisively [27], Lie Machines that manufacture digital legitimacy (Howard, 2020), Populist Communication that mobilizes emotion over deliberation (Krämer, 2021), and persistent Clientelism Post-Transition [28]. Finally, Adaptive Authoritarianism explains contemporary authoritarian practices using informal power and digital repression [29], while this study introduces Shadow Logic to conceptualize the shared mindset of both mafia and formal political actors in exercising power through informal and often illegal channels.

2.5 Conceptual Framework



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study uses the Critical Hermeneutics paradigm, positioning the researcher as an active interpreter of film texts by combining hermeneutics and social criticism to unravel power relations and ideology. The *Godfather* is analyzed as a political communication text to read informal power through symbols, language, and narrative structure using Paul Ricoeur's Mimesis I–III approach, and its communication elements are mapped using Harold Lasswell's model. This analysis produces the concept of Shadow Politics, which covers external and internal power, along with a cross-regime typology—ranging from lobbying and regulatory capture in mature democracies, patronage in transitional democracies, to hybrid power in authoritarian regimes—using Miles & Huberman's (1994) qualitative analysis

procedure and contextual reflection on Indonesia after the 2024 elections. This research aims to formulate the Shadow Logic model as a conceptual contribution to the study of political communication and film narrative analysis.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach to understand the meaning, symbols, and construction of power in films, as it focuses on the interpretation of social, cultural, and symbolic processes rather than numerical measurements [30], [31]. The analysis was conducted through hermeneutic-critical narrative analysis to examine the plot, conflict, characters, and visual symbols as constructions of political meaning and power relations in films [8], [23], with a hermeneutic and social critique epistemological foundation

to reveal symbolic domination and shadow political practices [26], [32], [33]. This framework is in line with Paul Ricoeur's theory of Mimesis, which views interpretation as a process of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration of meaning in relation to the text and the social world of the audience [6]. To maintain the accuracy of the analysis, the study applied Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive data analysis model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and verification and conclusion drawing in a cyclical and reflective manner.

3.2 Population and Sample

The research population includes all scenes, dialogues, and visual elements in: 1) The Godfather (1972), 2) The Godfather Part II (1974), 3) The Godfather Part III (1990). The selection of scenes used the purposive scene selection technique, as recommended by Creswell (2013), which is to select data that is most relevant to the focus of the research. Scenes were selected based on their relevance to: a) the historical horizon of the 1940–1970 audience (Mimesis I), b) the representation of shadow politics (Mimesis II), c) the refiguration of contemporary Indonesian politics (Mimesis III).

3.3 Research Object and Limitations

The object of this study is the representation of shadow politics in The Godfather Trilogy as a political communication text [23], [24], with analysis limited to scenes that depict power structures and informal politics. The social context of the United States (1940–1970) is treated as the audience's horizon rather than a historical object, while reflections on Indonesia after the 2024 elections are positioned at the stage

of refiguration, not as primary empirical data. Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics serves as the core analytical framework, with Lasswell's communication model used only as a supplementary mapping tool [10]. The unit of analysis is the scene as an audiovisual narrative sequence, examined through dialogue, gestures, expressions, *mise-en-scène*, actor relations, and symbols of power [7], [8], and selected based on their relevance to patronage, institutional co-optation, symbolic violence, value conflict, and power relations within the framework of shadow politics [1], [3].

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Sources

Data collection techniques included the following: 1) Repeated viewing of the film for in-depth observation [8], 2) Transcription of dialogue, referring to the official film script, 3) Recording of visual symbols, including spaces of power, family rituals, and signs of social status, 4) Compilation of a time code log, 5) Analytical memos, to capture initial interpretations [9], 6) Inter-coder discussions, to maintain dependability and confirmability [9].

3.5 Coding Process

In accordance with the lecturer's revision, the operationalization table was removed and replaced with a five-column coding process table. The coding process followed the steps outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994): 1) Initial coding (open coding): identification of symbols, actions, and power relations, 2) Grouping (axial coding): categorization of patronage, co-optation, rituals, conflict, and power escalation, 3) Coding reduction (selective coding): selection of core themes relevant to the problem formulation, 4) Inter-coder consensus: testing the reliability of interpretations.

Table 1. Coding Process

No.	Time Code	Scene	Initial Coding	Reduced Coding
1	00:05:21–00:07:10	Connie's wedding ceremony	Patronage, loyalty, protection	Shadow Politics: Patronage
2	00:42:11–00:45:33	Don Vito rejects the narcotics business	Honor values, family morality	Shadow Politics: Value Conflict

No.	Time Code	Scene	Initial Coding	Reduced Coding
3	01:22:04–01:26:08	Shooting of Don Vito	Escalation of violence, power struggle	Shadow Politics: Power Escalation
4	01:47:20–01:50:55	Murder of Sollozzo & McCluskey	Police co-optation, power transition	Shadow Politics: Internal State Capture

This table is an operational framework, not a research result. The indicators are arranged deductively from the main theory (Ricoeur) and supporting theories (Lasswell, Winters, Hadiz, etc.) to prepare the analysis categories. The short coding rules serve to maintain the consistency of the analysis in accordance with the stages of Miles & Huberman (1994), reduction, display, and verification.

3.6 Data Analysis Method with Miles & Huberman

Data analysis in this study uses the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data display, and verification. Reduction is carried out by selecting scenes that are relevant to theoretical indicators and eliminating scenes that are not related to power communication or shadow politics, while data display is presented in the form of a coding matrix that links scenes, indicators, and political meanings to facilitate pattern tracing. These three processes took place simultaneously and repeatedly, enabling the discovery of themes and typologies of shadow political communication through constant comparison, while verification was carried out by retesting conclusions on film data and confirmation between assessors to minimize bias [9].

3.7 Research Ethics

The research adheres to academic ethical principles, namely: use of films within the limits of fair use, clear

attribution of sources, theory-based interpretation rather than political opinion, and openness of the analysis process (confirmability).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Results

The research results were obtained from analysis units in the form of bundles of events that were causally related to each other, rather than single scenes, because shadow politics in The Godfather Trilogy emerged through a series of decisions that formed a gradual power structure. In the Mimesis II stage, the analysis identified key events that represent non-state political actions such as the replacement of state functions, the co-opting of officials, and the formation of a parallel power structure, using the Miles & Huberman qualitative analysis model to trace empirical and verified cause-and-effect relationships. This section is descriptive-empirical, referring directly to scenes, dialogues, and characters' actions without normative interpretation. In addition, a profile of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part I* (1972) is also presented to understand the historical and symbolic context of the narrative, which represents family morality, immigration, and informal power, and is read as a metaphor for the relationship between family, state, capital, and American power in the 1970s [34], [35].

Table 2. Awards for The Godfather (1972)

Category	Result	Recipient
Best Picture	Won	Albert S. Ruddy
Best Actor	Won	Marlon Brando
Best Adapted Screenplay	Won	Mario Puzo & Francis Ford Coppola
Best Director	Nominated	Francis Ford Coppola
Best Supporting Actor	Nominated	Al Pacino
Best Supporting Actor	Nominated	James Caan

Category	Result	Recipient
Best Supporting Actor	Nominated	Robert Duvall
Best Costume Design	Nominated	Anna Hill Johnstone
Best Film Editing	Nominated	William Reynolds & Peter Zinner
Best Sound	Nominated	Charlie Grenzbach
Best Original Score	Nominated (Withdrawn)	Nino Rota

Source: Academy Awards (1973); Britannica; Wikipedia

The nomination for Best Original Score for *The Godfather* (1972) was canceled by the Academy because Nino Rota reused musical themes from the Italian film *Fortunella* (1958), which violated the requirement that compositions must be completely original. As a result, the score was deemed ineligible, although Rota would go on to win an Oscar two years later for *The Godfather Part II*, which was considered to feature new and nominable compositions (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 1973; Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.; Wikipedia contributors, 2024). In terms of production, the film involved key figures of the New Hollywood era, such as Francis Ford Coppola as director, Mario Puzo as screenwriter, Gordon Willis as cinematographer with his iconic low-key lighting style, and a cast of leading actors—Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, James

Caan, and others—who powerfully represented patronage, moral conflict, and the power dynamics of the mafia family.

Meanwhile, *The Godfather Part II* (1974) is often considered to surpass the first film in narrative and thematic depth through its parallel structure: the rise of the young Vito Corleone and the consolidation of Michael Corleone's power. This structure builds a moral dialectic between community-based power and increasingly repressive shadow politics, which Dika (1999) refers to as the “genealogy of power.” The film also presents a more complex mapping of power, including the co-optation of state institutions and penetration into the legal economy, which is in line with the concept of state capture [16], and positions Michael as an informal political actor with institutional capacity equivalent to that of the state [36].

Table 3. Awards for *The Godfather II* (1974)

Category	Result	Recipient
Best Picture	Won	Coppola, Frederickson, Roos
Best Director	Won	Francis Ford Coppola
Best Supporting Actor	Won	Robert De Niro
Best Adapted Screenplay	Won	Francis Ford Coppola & Mario Puzo
Best Original Dramatic Score	Won	Nino Rota & Carmine Coppola
Best Art Direction / Set Decoration	Won	Dean Tavoularis, Angelo Graham, George R. Nelson
Best Actor	Nominated	Al Pacino
Best Supporting Actor	Nominated	Michael V. Gazzo
Best Supporting Actor	Nominated	Lee Strasberg
Best Supporting Actress	Nominated	Talia Shire
Best Costume Design	Nominated	Theadora Van Runkle

Source: Academy Awards (1975); Britannica; Wikipedia

The Godfather Part II (1974), widely recognized at the 47th Academy Awards in 1975, reflects an important cinematic achievement through its exploration of complex political and

moral themes. The film was directed and produced by Francis Ford Coppola with full creative control, co-written with Mario Puzo using a demanding parallel narrative structure, and supported by

Gordon Willis' cinematography, which emphasized the visual contrast between the past and the present. Multi-chronological editing by Barry Malkin and Peter Zinner reinforced the temporal dynamics, while the genealogical and melancholic music of Nino Rota and Carmine Coppola deepened the nuances of the tragedy of power. Produced by Paramount Pictures with a large budget and filmed across multiple locations—New York, Nevada, Cuba, and Sicily—the film presents a broad and layered postwar geopolitical context.

In terms of acting, the film features leading actors with strong narrative functions in constructing the logic of power. Al Pacino as Michael Corleone represents the consolidation of power at a state-like level, while Robert De Niro as the young Vito Corleone presents the genealogy of power through the origin story. Robert Duvall plays Tom Hagen, the family's informal bureaucrat, Diane Keaton as Kay Adams presents the moral conflict between family and power, Talia Shire shows the transformation of women's roles through Connie Corleone,

and Lee Strasberg as Hyman Roth personifies transnational criminal capitalism.

a. The Godfather Part III (1990)

The Godfather Part III (1990) closes the trilogy by presenting the final phase of Michael Corleone's moral and political journey, as he attempts to legalize the family's wealth and exit the criminal world, but becomes entangled in a global network of corruption involving transnational capital and formal institutions such as the Vatican. This narrative aligns with the concept of mafia states, which demonstrates how organized crime can intertwine with official institutions (Naím, 2012). From a moral philosophy perspective, this film is read as an ethical tragedy, in which Michael's attempts at redemption lead to personal destruction, confirming that shadow politics is not only structural but also destructive to family values, moral institutions, and individual existence (Hagberg, 2020).

Table 4. Awards for The Godfather Part III (1990)

Category	Result	Recipient
Best Picture	Nominated	Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Roos, Gray Frederickson
Best Director	Nominated	Francis Ford Coppola
Best Supporting Actor	Nominated	Andy García
Best Cinematography	Nominated	Gordon Willis
Best Film Editing	Nominated	Barry Malkin, Lisa Fruchtman, Walter Murch
Best Production Design	Nominated	Dean Tavoularis & Gary Fettis
Best Original Song	Nominated	Carmine Coppola & John Bettis

Source: Academy Awards (1991); Britannica; Wikipedia

The Godfather Part III (1990), which received seven nominations at the 63rd Academy Awards in 1991, was directed by Francis Ford Coppola with an emphasis on moral and geopolitical tragedy in the final phase of Michael Corleone's journey. Co-written with Mario Puzo, the film adopts a more political and global narrative, reinforced by Carmine Coppola's operatic and tragic music,

Gordon Willis' elegiac and dark cinematography, and Walter Murch's classic tragic editing structure. Produced by Paramount Pictures and shot across locations—New York, Sicily, and Rome—the film reinforces the theme of power transition in a global context.

In terms of casting, Al Pacino plays Michael Corleone in a tragic attempt at redemption, while Andy

García as Vincent Mancini represents the new heir to power. Diane Keaton returns as Kay Adams as the moral witness, Sofia Coppola as Mary Corleone becomes the point of collapse of the family's morality, Talia Shire as Connie Corleone plays the role of guardian of family loyalty, and Eli Wallach as Don Altobello personifies the figure of a transnational shadow politician. Overall, The Godfather trilogy forms a narrative unity rich in symbols of power, morality, family, and political economy, making it relevant for analysis through a critical-hermeneutic approach and reflection in the context of contemporary Indonesian politics at the Mimesis III stage.

b. Synopsis of The Godfather (I, II, III)

The first film, *The Godfather*, depicts the world of the Corleone family in the late 1940s to early 1950s, opening with the wedding of Connie Corleone, which confirms Don Vito Corleone's patriarchal position as the center of patronage and conflict resolution in the Italian-American immigrant community -American community, an early symbol of shadow politics based on moral-economic relationships between mafia leaders and their communities [11]. Don Vito's power is shown to work through protection, restoration of honor, and mutual loyalty, rather than open conquest. The main conflict arises when Virgil Sollozzo, supported by the Tattaglia family, asks the Corleones to enter the drug business, which Don Vito refuses on moral and political grounds due to the legal risks and threats to his network of relationships with the police and politicians. This refusal triggers an attack on Don Vito and becomes a turning point for the family's power. Michael Corleone, who had previously distanced himself from the family business,

then enters the conflict through the planned murders of Sollozzo and Police Captain McCluskey, marking the birth of a new leader. After his exile in Sicily and return to America, Michael gradually took control of the family, and the film closes with the affirmation of his transformation into the new Godfather—from an idealist to a leader who relies on violence and total control—which becomes the foundation for the hermeneutic reading of power, morality, and family in this study.

c. Synopsis of The Godfather Part II (1974)

The Godfather Part II presents a more complex narrative with a parallel structure that combines the past of Vito Corleone and the present of Michael Corleone. The film depicts the journey of young Vito, who fled Sicily after his family was killed by the local mafia, then established himself in America as a figure of protection through courage, ingenuity, and a network of patronage within the Italian-American community. This part reflects the historical phenomenon studied by Lupo (2011), that the mafia in the early 20th century gained social legitimacy due to the state's failure to protect immigrant communities from discrimination and violence. Meanwhile, Michael's narrative takes place in the late 1950s to early 1960s, where he expands his power to Cuba, Nevada, and the legal economic sector, but faces challenges from betrayal within the family (through Fredo), legal pressure from the US Senate, and business manipulation by figures such as Hyman Roth. The shadow politics in this film appear more complex, with Michael using lobbying, bribery, violence, and international networks to maintain the Corleone family's power. This film reveals the paradox of power: Vito built power in response to

oppression, while Michael destroyed the family's moral structure to maintain power. The audience is shown how shadow power can turn into a state-like institution, as argued by Hellman et al. (2000) in the concept of state capture. The film's ending shows Michael becoming increasingly estranged from his family, a representation of moral collapse due to deepening shadow politics.

d. Synopsis of The Godfather Part II (1974)

The third film in The Godfather series presents the global and geopolitical dimensions of the Corleone family's power, set in the late 1970s to 1980s, where Michael attempts to exit the criminal world by shifting the family's assets to the legal sector, including an international conglomerate linked to the Vatican's financial structure. However, this intention is hampered by high-level financial conspiracies, corruption within church institutions, and international political intrigue. The Vatican Bank scandal that forms the backdrop of this film is based on real events, namely the 1982 Banco Ambrosiano scandal, which involved the mafia, intelligence agencies, and church officials [19], showing that this film moves shadow politics from the local sphere to the global arena. Michael's movements are more tragic than tactical, as he attempts to right the wrongs of the past and start a new life, but the criminal world never completely lets him go. Internal family conflicts resurface through Vincent Mancini, Sonny's nephew, who is astute in reading the dynamics of power. The tragedy culminates when Mary, Michael's daughter, is killed in an attack intended for her father, closing the trilogy on an elegiac note that transcends politics and penetrates the deepest morality. Hagberg (2020) calls this film a

“modern moral tragedy” because it shows the existential destruction of a leader who cannot escape the power he has created. The Godfather Part III closes the trilogy by framing shadow politics as a force that transcends the boundaries of state, morality, and family, providing a strong foundation for Stage III of Mimesis in this study, which examines the relevance of shadow politics in the context of contemporary Indonesia after the 2024 elections.

e. Synopsis of The Godfather Part II (1974)

Ricoeur's (1984) analysis of Mimesis I emphasizes the socio-historical context that shapes the audience's horizon of meaning, with 1940s America as an important backdrop in The Godfather. During this period, the Italian-American community underwent a transition due to World War II, urbanization, and economic changes, remaining in a subordinate position and facing criminal stereotypes since the 19th century [19], [37]. In the absence of strong state protection, the mafia developed as a form of private governance and politics of protection for immigrant communities [20], while organized crime consolidated even though it was not recognized by the state until 1957 [38]. The value of family loyalty shaped the figure of Don Vito Corleone as a moral-communitarian leader who functioned as a protector and judge [11], so that the social reality of the 1940s became the basis for interpreting The Godfather as a narrative about community protection, parallel power, and the tension between family morality and criminality.

f. Synopsis of The Godfather Part II (1974)

When The Godfather was released in 1972, the United States was experiencing a crisis of

confidence in the state, triggered by the Watergate scandal, the trauma of the Vietnam War, and the economic crisis of stagflation, which gave rise to public cynicism towards politics and democratic institutions [34], [35]. In the context of the New Hollywood culture, this film was read as a critique of the state, corporations, and the power elite, which were considered corrupt [39], as well as a metaphor for the American power structure that operates through patronage, loyalty, co-optation, and hidden violence—a logic that equates the state with the mafia [8]. From the perspective of Mimesis I, the socio-historical experiences of 1970s audiences shaped their interpretation of *The Godfather* as a reflection of the crisis of state legitimacy, a critique of legal and illegal corruption, and nostalgia for the moral stability that was considered lost in modern American institutions.

g. Representations of Shadow Politics in The Godfather Trilogy

Within Ricoeur's (1984) framework, Mimesis II focuses on

narrative configuration—how films construct the logic of the story world through the interconnection of actions, symbols, characters, and plots to represent a particular power structure. At this stage, data from *The Godfather I–III* is presented in tables and narratives to map shadow political findings using the Miles and Huberman procedure: researchers identify scenes/bundles of events that contain power relations and strategic decisions, record dialogues and visual symbols, then perform coding and gradual reduction (Reduction 1 summarizes the empirical meaning of each event, Reduction 2 groups them into categories/patterns of recurring power relations) by ensuring that each category refers to verifiable empirical evidence. This section also summarizes the findings of Mimesis II *The Godfather Part I* based on thematic reduction across ten event bundles, and all descriptions are compiled descriptively and empirically without researcher interpretation.

Table 5. Mimesis II Coding Matrix (Miles & Huberman) *The Godfather Part I*

Bundle of Events (Scene)	Empirical Meaning (Reduction 1)	Intermediate Category (Reduction 2)	Mimesis II Findings
Bonasera seeks justice from Don Vito	The state fails; the mafia provides alternative justice	Private justice; patron-client relations	Private Justice as a Substitute for the State
Film industry intervention (horse head scene)	Economic decisions are enforced through extra-legal means	Economic coercion; non-state regulation	Shadow Economic Regulation
Don Vito rejects the narcotics business	The mafia formulates informal policy based on political calculation	Parallel legislation; structural conflict	Shadow Legislation and Policy-Making
Shooting of Don Vito & absence of hospital security	Law enforcement is co-opted; the mafia takes over security	Police co-optation; security takeover	Usurpation of State Security Functions
Murder of Sollozzo & McCluskey	The mafia nullifies the state's monopoly on violence	Political violence; fragmentation of sovereignty	Nullification of the State's Monopoly on Violence
Michael's evacuation to Sicily	Cross-border protection outside formal law	Parallel jurisdiction; transnational authority	Parallel Mafia Jurisdiction

Bundle of Events (Scene)	Empirical Meaning (Reduction 1)	Intermediate Category (Reduction 2)	Mimesis II Findings
Sit-down meeting among mafia families	Diplomacy and conflict resolution without state involvement	Non-state diplomacy; parallel governance	Shadow Diplomacy
Succession of Michael Corleone	Power is inherited and institutionalized	Regime succession; institutionalization	Succession of Shadow Power Regime
Montage of rival assassinations	Systematic elimination for regime consolidation	Shadow coup; centralization	Shadow Coup and Power Consolidation
Ritual recognition of Michael as Don	Symbolic legitimation and narrative control	Ritual legitimacy; closed authority	Legitimation of the Shadow Regime

The first finding shows that when the state's legal system fails to deliver justice, the mafia steps in as a provider of alternative justice mechanisms through patron-client relationships, with Don Vito acting as a judge without the involvement of state officials. The second finding reveals that the mafia intervenes in and controls strategic economic sectors through the threat of violence, functioning as an informal regulator that determines the distribution of economic opportunities. The third finding shows that mafia families perform informal policy-making functions, such as decisions about the drug business, which take into account the stability of relations with state apparatus and the balance of power. The fourth finding reveals the takeover of public security functions by the mafia, especially when the police are withdrawn due to co-optation, and the mafia takes on a protective role. The fifth finding highlights the cancellation of the state's monopoly on violence, with the mafia defeating the state's claim to coercive power, making violence a legitimate political instrument in shadow power. The sixth finding describes the mafia's parallel jurisdiction, which has transnational power, protecting and regulating individuals in areas beyond the reach of the state. The seventh finding

presents shadow diplomacy in sit-down forums between mafia family heads to arrange territorial division, business policy, and conflict resolution without state presence. The eighth finding shows structured succession mechanisms within the mafia, where leadership transfers through a process of mentorship and political knowledge transfer. The ninth finding describes the consolidation of power through the elimination of rivals in the Baptism Murders operation, resembling a political coup to reorganize the power structure. The tenth finding emphasizes the legitimacy of the mafia regime built through symbols, rituals, and information control, forming a closed authority structure and shadow authoritarian government.

h. The Godfather Part II

The Mimesis II analysis of *The Godfather Part II* uses Miles and Huberman's qualitative model, which views Mimesis II as the configuration stage of events, namely the arrangement of a series of actions, decisions, and power relations that form the narrative logic of the film. The focus of the analysis is directed at how the shadow power from the first film is exercised, maintained, and tested through internal conflicts, state intervention, and intergenerational relations. The description is

descriptive-empirical with the unit of analysis being eight bundles of events that are causally interrelated, presenting non-state power practices

that confront or replace the functions of the state in law, security, and political stability.

Table 6. Mimesis II Coding Matrix (Miles & Huberman) The Godfather Part II

Bundle of Events (Scene)	Empirical Meaning (Reduction 1)	Intermediate Category (Reduction 2)	Mimesis II Findings
U.S. Senate Hearing vs. Michael Corleone	Legal procedures occur without substantive consequences	Failure of legal institutions; neutralization of law	Neutralization of State Law Enforcement
Collapse of Frank Pentangeli's Testimony	Witness protection fails; prosecution collapses	Control of loyalty overrides law	Paralysis of Public Law Enforcement
Assassination attempt at Lake Tahoe	The state is absent; the mafia takes over security	Takeover of public protection	Usurpation of Security Functions
Pentangeli's imprisonment and death	The state controls space; the mafia controls decisions	Non-state penetration of legal institutions	Loss of State Control over Law
Young Vito Corleone vs. Don Fanucci	The state is absent; authority shifts through violence	State substitution; power transition	Emergence of Shadow Political Authority
Vito Corleone's social patronage	Social services are provided by the mafia	Patronage-based legitimacy	Replacement of State Welfare Functions
Sit-down among mafia leaders	Conflict resolution without state involvement	Non-state diplomacy	Management of Political Stability without the State
Execution of Fredo Corleone	Punishment is determined and carried out internally	Replacement of formal law	Replacement of Legal Functions by the Mafia

Mimesis II's analysis of The Godfather Part II identifies four main themes of shadow politics: (1) neutralization of state law enforcement, in which formal legal processes fail to undermine Michael Corleone's power; (2) the takeover of security and law enforcement functions by the mafia, which replaces the role of the state; (3) the formation and reproduction of shadow political authority through social patronage; and (4) the management of political stability through non-state diplomacy between mafia leaders. Overall, this film shows that the state functions nominally but is ineffective, while the mafia performs key functions within the power structure.

i. The Godfather Part III.

Mimesis II's analysis of The Godfather Part III uses Miles and Huberman's qualitative model, which views Mimesis II as a stage of event configuration that composes actions, decisions, and power relations in the film's narrative. This descriptive-empirical analysis focuses on the dynamics of shadow politics in the context of the state and transnationalism, with the unit of analysis being nine bundles of events that are causally interrelated, describing how shadow power operates, is negotiated, and is reproduced in an increasingly complex manner in the final phase of the trilogy.

Table 7. Mimesis II Coding Matrix (Miles & Huberman) The Godfather Part III.

Event Bundle (Scene)	Empirical Meaning (Reduction 1)	Intermediate Category (Reduction 2)	Mimesis II Finding
Vatican Bank & Immobiliare	Economic decisions depend on elites; policy continuity collapses	Institutional fragility; elite dependency	Fragility of Transnational State Decisions
Michael's pressure on Vatican officials	Formal procedures shift to private relations	Personal transaction politics	Elite Transaction Politics
Mafia Commission's demand over Immobiliare	Formal economic policy pressured by non-state interests	Non-state intervention; rent-seeking	Mafia Intervention in Formal Economic Policy
Joey Zasa conflict & Mafia Commission	Conflicts resolved outside state law	Shadow governance	Non-State Power Governance
Atlantic City helicopter attack	Violence reshapes power; state absent	Non-state political violence	Violence as an Instrument of Shadow Politics
Assassination of Joey Zasa	Punishment executed internally by mafia	Non-state punishment	Replacement of Criminal Law Functions
Pope's death & policy reversal	Institutions vulnerable to elite intrigue	Fragility of apex institutions	Vulnerability of State Institutions
Consolidation of Vincent Mancini	Non-state succession through violence	Reproduction of shadow regime	Non-State Transfer of Power
Parallel massacre at the opera	Decisions locked through elimination	Political elimination	Locking Political Decisions through Shadow Violence

The coding and data reduction process for The Godfather Part III followed the same procedure as the analysis of Part I and Part II, beginning with viewing the film to identify scenes containing economic-political decisions, cross-institutional elite relations, internal mafia conflicts, and the use of violence. The Reduction 1 stage summarizes the empirical meaning of each bundle of events to select indications of the fragility of state institutions, the intervention of non-state actors, and the replacement of legal and security functions, which are then grouped in Reduction 2 into thematic categories. The results are presented in a Miles and Huberman matrix (time code, event description, reduction, and category) which is summarized in Chapter IV, and produces nine main findings from nine event bundles that

summarize four major themes: weak state institutions, shadow power intervention in public governance, violence as a determinant of political decisions, and the reproduction of shadow power regimes outside formal mechanisms.

The Mimesis III stage in Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic-narrative framework reinterprets the findings of Mimesis II by positioning The Godfather as a medium of symbolic political communication that is interpreted by the public, rather than a direct reflection of Indonesian political reality. At this stage, shadow politics is understood as a practice of informal political communication—through symbols, rituals of loyalty, signals of power, and control of information—which often determines decisions and conflict resolution more than formal

procedures. This reflective reading highlights the distortion of political communication when formal channels are sidelined by shadow mechanisms, and affirms *Mimesis III* as a space for reflection to understand how film narratives shape awareness of formal and informal political communication practices.

4.2 Discussion

From the perspective of Political Communication Science, shadow politics is understood as a non-formal power system that works through strategic communication such as access control, patronage, symbols, and certainty of consequences. The findings of *Mimesis II* in *The Godfather* show that power does not depend on formal procedures, but rather on closed channels that produce compliance, in line with Harold D. Lasswell's political communication framework, which emphasizes who controls the message, the channel, and its impact [10]. This relevance is evident in the context of Indonesia after the 2024 elections, where formal legitimacy is maintained through procedural mechanisms such as Constitutional Court decisions, but many strategic decisions are formed through elite communication that is not always transparent and deliberative, as reflected in public policy cases such as the 4G BTS project and Pertamina's crude oil governance (ANTARA, 2023; Indonesian Supreme Court, 2024; Indonesian Attorney General's Office, 2025).

Within the framework of critical political communication, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of communication distortion. Habermas (1984) states that distortion occurs when communication is not directed towards achieving mutual understanding, but rather towards securing interests and power stability. In *The Godfather*, this distortion is evident when political messages are not conveyed argumentatively, but through gestures, implicit threats, and certain

consequences. Shadow power works effectively without public consensus, sufficient with the compliance of internal networks, showing that non-formal communication becomes the main mechanism in decision-making and political conflict resolution.

Reflections on Indonesia after the 2024 elections reveal a similar pattern, where procedural processes are carried out, but the regulation of power relations and policy directions are often determined through strategic communication among elites outside the public sphere. The Constitutional Court's decision formally closed the electoral dispute, but the post-election phase actually opened up a more relational and closed arena of political communication. Thus, shadow politics and shadow logic can be read as a way of understanding how power operates through communication distortion, enabling policy control without healthy public discourse, and ultimately potentially undermining transparency and public trust in the decision-making process.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the trilogy *The Godfather* represents shadow politics by portraying the mafia not merely as a criminal organization, but as a non-formal political actor that carries out key state functions—such as justice, security, economic regulation, diplomacy, and leadership succession—through personal networks, patronage, and closed strategic communication, thereby forming a parallel power system outside of formal institutions.

Shadow politics in the film functions as a non-formal power communication structure that emphasizes the effectiveness of consequences over legal procedures, with legitimacy built through relational recognition, symbols of power, and consistency of action, rather than electoral mandates or written laws, resulting in obedience without a public deliberative arena. Its relevance to the contemporary Indonesian context, especially after the 2024 elections, is

structural: shadow politics can be read as a mechanism of informal power communication that runs parallel to state institutions after procedural legitimacy is achieved, when strategic decisions and the distribution of influence are negotiated through elite communication outside the public sphere. Therefore, restricting shadow politics practices is not enough through tightening formal laws, but requires

strengthening the public deliberative arena, expanding policy communication transparency to the formulation and implementation stages, strengthening political communication ethics and elite accountability, and developing political communication research that explores the role of media, digital technology, and network communication in shaping power legitimacy outside formal democratic mechanisms.

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