

# Political Elites and National Development in Nigeria (1999-2024): An Overview

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## Abstract

Focusing on political elites' dual character as facilitators and barriers to national progress, this article examines the function of Nigeria's political elites from 1999 to 2024. The political elites have a disproportionate say in allocating resources and crafting policies after the restoration of democratic rule, frequently putting their own interests and those of their groups ahead of the common good. As a result, people no longer have faith in government because of pervasive corruption, heightened inequality, and persistent societal tensions. The study sheds insight on the nation's problems, the historical setting of elites' power dynamics, and the effects of elites conduct on development outcomes in the country. In addition to that, it delves into the current political climate, which has seen changes such as the emergence of youth movements and calls for accountability that poses a threat to the power of the existing elites. The study concludes by stating that a more egalitarian political climate can only be achieved by tackling the problems of elites' misbehaviour and subsequently promoting institutional reforms, transparency, and more citizen involvement in Nigeria political affairs.

**Keywords:** Political Elites, Development, Corruption, Governance, Accountability.

## Introduction

Nigeria returned to democratic government in 1999, wherein the country's political elites have been essential in determining the direction of progress. During this period, there have been lots of back-and-forth contestations between the various levels of authority and the consequences for the common people of the choices made by the ruling class. People generally view the political elites in Nigeria as anti-developmentally oriented, because they put their own interests and those of their groups ahead of the common good, even though they have the power to bring about positive change (Omeje, 2019). Corruption, patronage, and inequality have plagued the

Nigerian societies for a long time, making it difficult for them to implement good government and achieve sustainable development. Adebayo (2021) pointed out that elites control over resources and policy development has contributed to widening socio-economic inequality in Nigeria. This, in turn, has led to the marginalization of ordinary individuals and a decline in public faith in democratic institutions. Many policies have been enacted by the elites to benefit a small group of their people, while large portions of the public have been left impoverished and powerless in the process.

The various social factors are necessary for a nation's growth to take place. Elites' overriding interest has a major effect, if not the deciding factor, on the course of national development. This is in addition to the unique strengths and weaknesses of various development forces and structures inherent in state formation that development actors seek. At the height of modernization ideology, development was thought to be connected to elites' theory because, after dealing with traditional elites, it was believed that committed elites would ideally be agents of modernization in less developed or backward countries (Beriledum & Serebe, 2013). Those who were most affected by western education, especially the English-speaking minority in Nigeria, were also the ones who led and supported the nationalist movement (Coleman, 1958). A heightened awareness of race and politics owes a great deal to the contributions of westernized elites. Therefore, Nigeria's ruling class was behind the country's fight for independence; they hoped to change the country's politics, economy, and society for the better in the long run.

Western education's rapid expansion heralded the rise of an elite class that would sway the semi-literate masses. The founder of self-government was education, as Macauley (Beriledum & Serebe, 2013) puts it. This is fitting because this demographic aspect is responsible for creating policies at the national and international levels that boost economic growth. The ruling class has a larger impact on national growth since their decisions affect other parts of society. Therefore, the development and progress of a nation depend on the effective interpretation, discourse, and decision making of its top class. This means that the policymaking process has been happening within the framework of the country's growth, mirroring the power dynamics among the different elites. On the other hand, Nigeria's ruling class appears to have taken on a role that is out of character when it comes to practical development tasks. According to recent research in Nigeria, the country's ruling class isn't really involved in the country's national exploitation (Beriledum & Serebe, 2013).

The establishment and behaviour of Nigeria's elite group have failed to contribute to the country's progress, even though American political scientist John Purcell noted in 1974 that strong initiatives within elite groups are crucial for progress (Frank, 1991). There was no inclination within Nigeria's ruling class to consider the constructive use of elite advantage as a tool for guiding the country's growth because the country's elites have failed to effectively mobilize their potential, Nigeria has failed to live up to her full potential. There is a severe shortage of clean water, proper medical treatment, and educational opportunities for the general public today. Various dangerous illnesses are allegedly affecting millions of Nigerians (Beriledum & Serebe, 2013). However, things have changed in Nigeria's politics for some years now. There are new movements on the rise, and young people in particular are speaking up against the current system by calling for more openness, more accountability, and changes that put people's needs first (Ibrahim, 2023). Examining the political elite's positive and

negative effects on Nigeria's growth since 1999, this article seeks to shed light on the critical need for structural reforms to create a political climate that is more welcoming to everyone.

## **Conceptualization of Terms**

### **Elite**

An elite group of people are known as technocrats or bureaucratic elites if their ability to legitimately participate in the policymaking process is largely dependent on their technical and professional qualifications. Still, it is important to keep in mind that there are certain distinctions. Knowledge elites are individuals whose influence in policymaking is mostly based on their technical expertise. According to Beriledum and Serebe (2013) public policy experts can find employment either within the government or with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, or consulting firms. It is because of the high level of technical knowledge needed for their prestigious positions in government, technocrats include ministers, deputy ministers, central bank governors, and heads of regulatory bodies. In this context, a technocrat is an individual whose professional path has brought them to a position of significant political power, such as a ministerial position or a role in determining national policy (Beriledum & Serebe, 2013). Also, executives at the highest levels of government, such as the national director or permanent secretary, make extensive use of their management positions to sway policy decisions by drawing on their extensive knowledge of administrative and technical matters. We must differentiate between the narrower bureaucracy and the one in Nigeria as the former does not exist in the conventional Weberian sense (Marcelo, 2009).

According to Beledum and Serebe (2013), a person is considered to be part of the political elite if they hold a position of statutory or institutional power within the state or if they are a member of the ruling coalition and so have influence over policy decisions. Consideration of the idea's constituent aspects, such as inequality, dominance, and organization, is more appropriate. Marcelo (2009) claimed that the first one relies on a certain way of portraying the divide between the powerful and the weak, the privileged and the commoners, or the governed and the ruled. On the other hand, the second method uses elite cohesion and power concentration as its analytical axes. Whether a minister leans more towards politics than technocracy depends on their career history. The terms are used interchangeably since these definitions could overlap. Public officials with deep expertise in a specific policy field may be considered a member of an elite group inside the bureaucracy because of the influence they exert on policy decisions. Moreover, the technocrats provide expertise and political influence on policymaking through sector-level policy creation, cabinet-level decision-making, influencing other decision-makers, and policy issue views. Those at the top of federal, state, and local governments are, as indicated before, seen as part of the elite.

### **Corruption**

Culture plays a significant role in defining corruption; what is considered unethical by some may be considered perfectly acceptable by others. Therefore, there is no generally agreed-upon definition of corruption. Corruption has a legal definition and explanation that follows relevant statutes and regulations, but it also has a broader use to describe social and political wrongs that don't fit neatly into those categories. Corruption was defined by Transparency

International as behaviour on the part of officials in the public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, in which they wrongly and criminally benefit themselves or those close to them, by misuse of public authority entrusted to them (Transparency International, 2017). Ikubaje (2018) stated that corruption occurs when private or public assets are unlawfully acquired for private, group or individual benefit without proper oversight. Corruption, as used in this study, refers to the misuse of authority by influential people or high-ranking government officials. Examples of such crimes include misappropriation of public finances through money laundering, getting contracts and tenders, taking public land, influencing elections, not remitting government tax payments, or paying for funds that do not exist. Corruption can also be defined as unethical activity that the general population finds unacceptable. This implies that corruption is a worldwide problem and that every community has an anticipated degree of morality. The anti-corruption laws of a nation are the most commonly used rule.

Corruption comes in many ways. Regardless, most books and articles about corruption fail to differentiate between the many forms of the crime. So, dishonesty is usually considered a separate category. Researchers have attempted to categorize corruption into distinct types, but generalization remains challenging due to the wide variety of corruption. Since several forms of corruption might occasionally be linked to one another via other crimes, Kenny and Søreide (2008) argue that categorizations oversimplify matters. Furthermore, Morris (2021) argued that knowing the official's place of employment could help differentiate between various forms of corruption. There were two primary forms of corruption that he identified. A lack of integrity at all levels of government. While lower-level public officials are corrupt, high-level officials such as presidents, ministers, parliamentarians, and others are impacted by corruption. In addition to this, Abu and Stanieswski (2019) contended that while corruption manifests in various ways, the one constant is the corrupt individual's character.

A study conducted by Anassi (2020) identified bureaucratic corruption, institutional corruption, and political or grand corruption as the three main types of corruption in Africa. Corruption inside a network of recognized and sanctioned syndicates is what he meant when he described institutional corruption. Public officials engage in bureaucratic corruption, according to him, when they consistently and methodically receive bribes in exchange for favours. Grand corruption occurs when politicians seize power and money by dishonest or fraudulent means. Dike (2017) asserted that Nigeria is plagued by several forms of corruption. Political corruption occurs at the most senior levels of government, whereas electoral corruption occurs at lower levels and involves the buying of votes, special favours, or promises of votes. Corruption on the street is identical to corruption in the bureaucracy, he claims. According to him, this type of corruption is evident in settings such as schools, hospitals, and dealings with the police.

## **Political Elites**

“The belief in or practice of rule by elites”, meaning these individuals are the major political and social actors, with its roots in capitalism, an ideology that promotes class inequality in nations (Higley & Pakulski, 2012). According to Odubajo and Alabi (2014), social formations were impacted by the political processes and skills that affect economics, which in turn shapes the idea of elitism. Albert (2005) argued that social harmony may be achieved through the stratification paradigm, and elite theory asserts that pluralism does not increase the difficulties faced by societies in terms of leadership. Welsh (1979) mentioned that social stratification into

a socially defined upper class and a socially defined lower class constitutes hierarchy. Therefore, social hierarchies are typically shaped like a pyramid, with higher-ups enjoying more power and influence than those lower on the totem pole. There are more people at the base of the food chain than there at the very top. Those responsible for social, economic, and political issues ought to face consequences. They are powerful because they are articulate, persuasive, charismatic, motivating and able to represent and promote symbols that a large audience can identify with. The way political elites' structure themselves to be better than the broader populace is correlated with inequality, according to Albert (2005).

When it comes to politics, elitist regimes put the needs of the ruling class ahead of those of the governed, which can make the subaltern sections of society feel left out. Rather than considering the needs of the whole public, it gives preference to a select few (the elite), because any potential benefits of having elected officials at the local level are thwarted by their elitist tendencies. Marcelo (2009) defined political elites as those who have the legal or institutional power to make decisions at the state level, or who are members of the current coalition government and have sway over policymaking. The phrase "political elite" is a description of the segment of ruling class whose principal function is to further political agendas, wherein the governed, who get the advantages of power, are controlled and directed by the ruling elites (Luca, 2012). All political responsibilities are also handled by the ruling class, and the privileged few achieve material, intellectual, and moral dominance, which in turn gives them power.

The ruling class responds by taking measures to ensure it continues to have social power. The political elite's actions mostly aim at preserving their power position. Those in authority, in Luca's view, are ambitious people who want nothing more than to rise-up in the ranks, make names for themselves and have a say in how society is shaped. For the elite, who get their drive from the ever-present struggle for political dominance, the very minimum is to remain in power. No matter the form of government, there is always a tiny but well-organized group of people who have access to far superior resources, the capacity to consistently and dramatically affect political results, and admits as much (Kifordu, 2011).

The political elites are considered a tiny minority when compared to the entire population. This ruling class has amassed power through a number of channels, but they place greater faith in the state's authority and institutions than in the feedback loops already established in Nigerian society. As far as the Nigerian political elite are concerned, there is a predatory and socially isolated core executive composition that functions inside cozy and restricted networks. In order to maintain continuity in political positions and responsibilities, typical behaviours among the elite, such as corrupt patronage trades, are linked to shared history, frequent public appearances, and vested interests. Because they control other sectors of society by their decisions, the ruling class has a greater influence on the development of the nation. Success in interpreting, discussing, and making decisions by a nation's upper class determines the nation's development and advancement. Within this paradigm, Nigeria's ruling class seems to play an especially realistic role, which is rare for developing nations because the policy-making process reflects the power dynamics among the various elites.

## **Political Elite in Contemporary Nigeria**

The studies conducted by Olowu and Chanie (2016), Rotberg (2021), and others preferred focusing on failed nations to the fragile state that Nigeria has become due to its elites. Members of Nigeria's political elite have failed to persuade the general public that their actions in politics and business were in the best interests of all Nigerians, a sentiment echoed by the country's many news outlets. The 1967–1970 Nigerian Civil War was sparked by a power struggle among Nigeria's military/political elites and claimed the lives of millions of people from all walks of life. Also, Ogbeide and Aghahowa (2005) noted that the resource control issue reflected the ongoing disputes among Nigerian power brokers on the distribution of the massive sums of money received by the government from petroleum sales. In times of ideological, political, and resource-related strife and misunderstanding, the ruling class in Nigeria has a history of appealing to religious, ethnic, and regional sentiments, which has led to the failure of previous democratic experiments (Ezeani, 2003 & Iyekekpolo, 2020). As a result of this mentality, Nigeria is considered both the second most corrupt country and the seventh poorest in the world (Transparency International, 2000). Nigeria's entire social infrastructure, including its schools, hospitals, roads, power, and water projects, are crumbling under this assumption, which also explains the country's pervasive property and life insecurity. Iyekekpolo (2020) noted that they have financed insurgencies in Nigeria, including Boko Haram and the herdsmen insurgencies.

The vast majority of statistics point to the persistence of widespread political unrest, corruption, and economic stagnation in Nigeria (Kyarem et al., 2020). A number of indicators of political instability exist in the nation, including politicians' desperation for power, violent electioneering, and election manipulation (CFR, 2019). Changes to neo-patrimonialism in Nigeria have been driven by the country's political elites and have an impact on the players, setting and process. These can be anything from seismic shifts caused by violent revolt or democratic transaction to godfather characters linked to the political change in Nigeria (Gazibo, 2012). Also, godfathers in politics are able to control public institutions because they can put their wards into high-ranking posts (Isaac, 2005 & Nwaeze, 2012). Not only do godfathers provide financial support for these public officials, but they also manage to instigate violence and corruption to the point that their protégés are unable to compete, and they are sure to get away with all the illegalities that come with it (Lackey, 2012). Due to the actions and policies of its elites, the Nigerian state has become a socially intolerant and villainous institution that is criticized for being too weak, too extensive, too repressive, too dependent on foreign powers, and too ubiquitous (Azaiki, 2015). The ruling/political class of Nigeria has criminalized politics, deinstitutionalized the country, and formalized power. The incapacity of the government to safeguard its inhabitants, widespread bloodshed, and a lingering insurgency are all symptoms of a failed state, which is what Nigeria has become by the actions and activities of the political elites.

## **Elitism and National Development in Nigeria**

To be elitist is to hold a position of authority or to head a political group. Morrell and Hartley (2006) stated that this characterizes politicians chosen by the people, who are subject to re-election, and who work within and have an impact on a system of laws and constitutional provisions. They were elected by the people to lead the state. This definition has certain limitations, though, as it only applies to elected political leaders and not to those who are

appointed or who rose to power in the military via coup d'état. According to Ogbeidi (2012) political leaders are members of the ruling class who are tasked with overseeing the resources and administration of a political entity, such as a country. They accomplish this by establishing and shaping policy priorities that impact the territory through various decision-making mechanisms and institutions that are put in place to ensure the proper development of the territory. According to Anekwe (2020) leadership is the biggest problem for Nigeria and other poor nations. Anekwe claims that current and former Nigerian leaders have failed to deliver quality leadership able to address the country's many problems, and that this is a problem that has plagued developing nations like Nigeria for a long time. Anekwe further states that, governments have failed to establish open and responsible institutions that can guarantee economic development, good governance, and citizen protection. Relying on dictatorship and repression, experiencing a precipitous economic downturn due to indiscriminate corruption, and implementing exclusive ethnic policies to guarantee self-succession tendencies all exacerbate this capability gap.

Bribery, egotism, power, and trade liberalization are practices that the majority of Nigerian policymakers and decision-makers partake in (Adejimi, 2005). According to Fagbadebo (2007), the Nigerian state suffers from a cyclical legitimacy crisis, poor governance, political instability, and high-level corruption. There was widespread corruption and waste due to ethnic rivalry for resources, which created problems for the country's authoritarian government in the form of a legitimacy crisis and political intrigues. In addition to that, any serious attempt to develop Nigeria is thwarted by the corruption and lack of vision of the country's leaders, both current and historical (Onodugo, 2016). Considering this, the mindset and actions of Nigeria's political elite pose the greatest threat to the country's progress towards prosperity. Insecurity, poverty, and unemployment are only a few of the socio-economic problems that have worsened as a result of the corrupt, nepotistic, self-centred, and visionless leadership in Nigeria. Although previous research has concentrated on illuminating Nigeria's leadership difficulties, the current investigation sought to establish a connection between the country's political leadership and its progress towards greater prosperity.

## **Challenges of Elitism Preventing National Development in Nigeria**

**Insufficient Application of the Rule of Law:** A nation or society that operates under the rule of law is one in which laws, rather than individuals, make all the major policy decisions. An individual cannot exert absolute control over a country or community due to the rule of law. Everyone, even government officials, is subject to it and it serves as a check on their actions. Because many people do not know or understand their constitutional rights, it is easier for others to violate their rights. The rulings of the judiciary and the rule of law are disregarded by the leadership of Nigeria. Because of this, the court is unable to carry out its functions properly. Judicial administration is characterized by a lack of enforcement ability, and political elites continue to use patronage appointments to undermine the judiciary's independence (Lawal & Owolabi, 2012).

**Lack of Transparency and Accountability:** From 1960 to the present day, the terrifying legacy of the Nigerian government is their lack of transparency and responsibility. A transparent and accountable system will never exist in a society where corruption is deeply ingrained (Anekwe, 2020). Furthermore, according to Anekwe, a government that is responsible to its citizens is one that listens to their concerns and acts accordingly. The rule of

law and the judiciary are the most effective means of enforcing accountability. Rule of law in Nigeria is non-existent, and the court appears to have lost her independence.

**Problems with Corruption:** While it is true that corruption exists in all societies, Nigeria is now among the most corrupt in the world. David Cameron, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, agreed, calling Nigeria a "fantastically corrupt" country whose leaders are corrupt. According to Iyoha et al. (2015), corruption is a major hindrance to effective government in the country. Okeyim et al. (2013) noted that despite the restoration of democracy in Nigeria, the country's economic growth and progress have been hindered for over twenty years due to theft and misuse of money (Abullahi, 2009).

**Absence of Ideology:** The tragedy of Nigerian politics after 1999 is the absence of an ideology. A group of people's commonly held views and ideals is referred to as an ideology. The political elites in Nigeria, according to Anekwe (2020) are a class that does not contribute to economy and instead benefits from their monopoly on governmental institutions. When seen through the lens of the unchecked power struggle for patronage, influence, and power, the over-politicization of the Nigerian state becomes clear. A new class of locally elected officials free of ideological allegiance emerged as a natural consequence of the political battle. Politics devolved into a battleground for superficial, egocentric political advantage rather as an arena for ideologically grounded political battles/contestations.

These aforesaid aspects and other things are preventing Nigeria from progressing as a nation. According to Ojukwu (2019) all prior efforts at a democratic transition in Nigeria have been fruitless, because the challenges of achieving durable democracy, good governance, and development are so great. It is incredible that Nigeria, a behemoth among African nations, is still struggling with the issue of poor leadership, even after all these years of independence. Since independence, a series of presidents have risen to power/authority, but each of them has been bereft of vision, mission and dedication to progress.

## Critical Review

Facilitating an effective political-power process is one of the primary obstacles to effectively administering diverse governments. According to Odubajo and Alabi (2014) the ruling class in Nigeria has a stranglehold over the country's political power dynamics due to the capitalist nature of the government. They went on to say that if things were to change, it would be necessary to overthrow the current political and social system by means of a revolution. Also, the Political Elites and Local Government Administration in Nigeria were the subject of a research (Okebi et al., 2023). They said that in order to keep Nigeria from becoming a fragile state and to guarantee the sustainability of good governance, inclusive governance and political engagement were necessary. According to the research, political elites both foster unstable relationships and impede the socio-economic growth of the general populace. In furtherance a study conducted by Obilor and Amadi (2024) stated that despite decades of democratic leadership, Nigeria has persisted in a number of social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, etc., which have, over time, hampered national development. This could be due to the fact that Nigeria has the wrong individuals in key leadership positions. Based on poverty, instability, and unemployment rates, they claimed, political leadership has not been able to help the country progress. Also, Beriledum and Serebe (2013) argued that the ethnification of the political process by Nigeria's elites is a major factor in the country's



development issues and its impact on the creation and execution of public policy. This situation exemplifies the ‘we want our man in national politics’ attitude. They stated that national progress is impossible in such a setting because it undermines meritocracy and good developmental policies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Elite Theory**

The study conducted by Pareto (1935) utilized the idea of political elites put forward by Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) due to its effectiveness in explaining their process. This idea proposes that certain individuals, often from more privileged backgrounds, wield disproportionate power in several spheres of society, including politics, economics, education, and the media. According to Pareto, there is a physical, intellectual, and moral inequality among humans. He further stated that there are two types of elites: those with direct or indirect ties to government, known as the ‘governing elite’ and those without such ties but with such societal clout that they exert influence over the governing elite (Pareto, 1935).

The arguments is pertinent to this study because, as a result of political elites controlling policy and decision-making across society, this has an impact on events and development levels everywhere. Another way to look at Nigeria’s political elites is as two groups: those directly involved with running the country (the ‘governing elite’) and those whose positions allow them to exert influence on the government (the ‘non-governing elite’). As a result, the ruling class in Nigeria is the centre of attention, much like Pareto’s original target. These elites’ leadership styles and the impact on national development are often reflective of their differing intellectual, moral, and physical qualities. But Nigeria’s political elites have been inundated with politicians who share their moral, intellectual, and physical traits. Over the years, this has impeded the country’s progress and development. The critics pointed out that it does not quantify or differentiate between the characteristics that set elites apart from the general population. Also, it is hard to say that Nigeria’s political elites are better than the general population, because research showed that the country’s current leadership is comprised of politicians who lack the mental, emotional, and physical strength to effectively lead the country towards prosperity.

### **Need & Relevance**

Following Nigeria’s restoration to democratic rule in 1999, the country’s political elites began to have considerable influence over the country’s growth trajectory. Scholars such as Adeleke (2020) contend that corruption and waste of resources occur when these elites put their own political and personal interests ahead of the growth of the nation. The research by Ogunleye (2016) provided credence to this view as he drew attention to the fact that political elites’ behaviour has persistently eroded popular confidence and impeded efficient government. In addition to being self-serving, these elites are ‘inimical’ to the nation’s socio-economic advancement. The marginalization of larger social interests occurs when power is concentrated within a few elites (Chukwuma, 2022). Because policies tend to mirror the desires of the ruling class rather than the requirements of the common people, this has contributed to the perpetuation of poverty and inequality. Although there are some research studies on this aspect, there is a need to understand the effects with regard to nation’s socio-economic growth and future prospects. It is to be noted that majority of research studies only look at immediate

effects or single occurrences when analyzing time. Hence, this study aims to identify the appropriate gaps through observations and relevant discussions by tracking changes in political dynamics and their effects on development through a longitudinal examination of the impact of political elites on development from 1999 to 2024. Also, the study addresses these gaps by offering a detailed analysis of how Nigeria's political elites contribute to the country's progress. Thus, by tackling these concerns, it hopes to add to the larger conversation about development and governance within the Nigerian political landscape.

## Objectives

- To look at the relationship between Nigeria's political elite and the country's development from 1999 to 2024
- To Take a look at the ways the ruling class in Nigeria has shaped policy and administration and weigh the good and bad effects on the country's progress
- To determine how widespread corruption is among political leaders and what it means for government transparency and accountability, paying special attention to the effects on public faith in government and the stability of its institutions
- To examine how elites' interests have aided in the marginalization of specific groups in Nigeria by analyzing the link between elite behaviour and socio-economic inequality
- To make concrete suggestions for changing the political system so that it supports more inclusive government by increasing openness, accountability, and fair development

## Methodology

The present study adopted qualitative research to understand the Nigeria's political elites and its policies with regard to country's development from 1999 to 2024. The entire study is based on secondary sources, which included scholarly articles and material culled from various official sources such as reports, textbooks, periodicals, newspapers, etc. The study adopted descriptive research design to explain the observations, which are discussed accordingly.

## Observation

### Influence of Political Elite on Policy Making and Governance in Nigeria

Policy and governance decisions in Nigeria are heavily influenced by the country's political elite, who in turn determine the course of the country's growth. It is necessary to thoroughly analyze their positions in the political environment since their impact can have both good and negative repercussions.

### Positive Contributions of Political Elite

**Economic Development:** The oil and gas industry, which is dominated by the country's elites, has been a major driver of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP). Partnerships that support infrastructure development can be facilitated through their linkages (Adeleke, 2020).

**Advocacy for Social Issues:** Legislation addressing pressing concerns like gender equality and poverty reduction is a product of the efforts of certain political elites who fight tirelessly

for social justice and human rights. Consider how the political participation of powerful women has shifted the conversation towards women's rights (Nwankwo, 2019).

**Stability and Governance:** Political elites can contribute to stability by promoting dialogue and consensus-building among various factions. Their role in mediating conflicts, especially in regions affected by ethnic tensions, has been crucial in maintaining peace (Ikelegbe, 2020).

### **Negative Impacts of Political Elite**

- **Dishonesty and Lack of Leadership:** Majority of Nigeria's political elites participate in corrupt activities that steal from the public coffers, making corruption a major problem in the country. A decline in public confidence and an impediment to efficient government are both results of this mishandling (Transparency International, 2021).

Today, Nigerian politics is both the most lucrative industry and the bedrock upon which the whole Nigerian system rests. It is not surprising that there is a rise in the number of political godfathers who, after paying the astronomical price to have their godsons elected, demand to be told when, how, and even what policies to implement, even when this goes against popular opinion. It is arguable that the politically sponsored agents of Nigeria's ruling class the president, governors, and lawmakers are among the most influential, if not the only, factors influencing the country's policymaking process. Instead of considering the needs of the 'helpless general public', the interests of a small group of strong elites dictate the form and trajectory of policy results.

Based on what we know about the political elite's behaviour from the previous analysis, one can see that non-elite orientated policies face constant roadblocks from the moment they are proposed until they are put into action, that is, if they survive the legislative crucifixion that takes place in the name of arguments. Even more glaring is the fact that the Executive Branch of government frequently disregards and delays or even abandons policy choices that go via legislative processes. In summary, it is impossible to overstate the role of elites in shaping policy. As we have seen in the previous analysis, elites are now deeply involved in the policymaking process, and they use their connections to the government to influence policy in their favour. This is done at the expense of the general public, as will become clearer when we look at the new minimum wage.

### **Minimum Wage and Political Elites salaries in Nigeria**

After Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, the federal government passed the pay Board and Industrial Council Act, giving the Minister of Labour the authority to establish mechanisms for determining minimum pay and service standards in the country's public and private sectors. Still, in September 1981, the late President Shagari signed the first national minimum wage bill into law. The late Hassan Sunmonu, who was the leader of the Nigerian Labour Congress, pushed for this bill. Except for seasonal workers and businesses with less than 50 employees, this new law extended coverage to all full-time employees. Every month, the salary was ₦125 (Nigerian Naira (NGN)). This salary was approximately \$204. This was based on the 1981 exchange rate of \$1 = 0.61 naira. The minimum salary from 1981 would be worth around 265,000 Naira in 2024 at the current currency rate of roughly US\$1 = 1,300 naira. ₦30,000 (about \$24 USD) per month is the current minimum wage in the country.

Because of this, the minimum wage in 1981 was more than eight times higher than the minimum pay today.

The minimum wage in Nigeria went through three revisions between 1981 and 2018. It was raised to ₦55,00 in the year 2000. A new national minimum wage was put into law in 2011 by President Goodluck Jonathan. The new minimum wage law raised the salary cap from ₦7,500 to ₦18,000. Employers in the public and private sectors with more than 50 employees were subject to this new regulation.

The 2019 review of the National Minimum Wage was initiated by the government. The federal government suggested ₦24,000 as the national minimum wage, while state governors advocated ₦20,000. Unions sought ₦30,000 per month. The minimum salary was set at ₦27,000.00 in January 2019 by the National Council of State, however governors countered with an offer of ₦ 22,500.00. Although they first turned down the offer, the NLC then suggested a payment of thirty thousand naira (₦30,000.00). The federal government agreed with this figure and in March 2019, the National Minimum Wage Act 2019 was passed. Ex-President Muhammadu Buhari gave his official approval and signature to the revised national minimum wage. The national minimum wage was raised from ₦ 18,000 to ₦ 30,000 per month as a result of new law.

With the passage of the National Minimum pay (Amendment) Act 2024, Nigeria's minimum pay was raised, and the minimum wage review period was shortened:

**Minimum Wage:** The minimum wage increased from ₦30,000 to ₦70,000.

**Review period:** From every five years down to every three, that is how often the minimum wage is reviewed in Nigeria.

President Bola Tinubu signed the bill into law on July 29, 2024. The new minimum wage has been gradually implemented throughout states, with a few that have not even adopted it yet. For instance, on December 1, 2024, the government of Osun State will start paying its civil personnel the new minimum salary of ₦75,554.20. It is because of the reason that 'states cannot afford to pay', unless petroleum subsidies are eliminated and the federal revenue allocation formula is reviewed to remit more money to the states, the federal and most state governments are dragging their feet in implementing the new minimum wage, which coincidentally originated from the executive branch.

The problem here is that the executives are suddenly shouldering the blame for the new minimum wage of ₦70,000, which is so low that it cannot cover the basic needs of low- or middle-income earners in Nigeria, while our political leaders and their many appointees get or pay themselves fat undisclosed salaries with no problems at all. An absence of genuine political will to enact people-oriented policies is the root cause of the problem, according to the study. This serves to emphasize the character and nature of the political elites' impact on the policymaking process and development in Nigeria. Unfortunately, and regrettably too, the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Alhaji Sanusi Lamido Sanusi told Nigerians that 40 percent of the national budget goes into the servicing of the 469 members of the National Assembly yearly, leaving the remaining population of over 200 million Nigerians with the balance 60 percent. In this kind of situation, how can there be national development?

## Minimum Wage of Political / Elected Office Holders Remuneration in Nigeria

Salaries for public servants in Nigeria are significantly lower than those of their elected and political colleagues. Most Nigerians view politics as a goal in and of itself, rather as a means to a goal, due to this disparity: A statistical examination of the salary of a political or elected person uncovered an astounding amount, leaving one perplexed as to whether or not it is in accordance with the constitution. On July 22, 2013, the Daily Trust released the following figures as salaries and wages for the political elites in Nigeria:

Salary Components	Senators (₦)	House of Reps. (₦)
Annual Package	35 million	29.28 million
Accommodation	4 million	3.97million
Car Loan	8 million	6.9 million
Furniture	6 million	5.956 million
Constituency	5 million	1.7 million
Car Maintenance	1.52 million	595.563
Entertainment	202.140	198.521
Recess	202.640	198.521
Wardrobe	405.280	397.042

Source: RMAFC (In Daily Trust 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013)

The data in the table above demonstrates that federal parliamentarians in Nigeria earn substantially more money than their colleagues in more prosperous and industrialized countries.

In Nigeria, a lawmaker may expect to earn a yearly salary of almost \$189,000, or N30.242 million. This is 116 times more than the GDP per person in the country. In comparison to their counterparts in the wealthier nations whose data was examined in terms of volume of cash earnings, the wages collected by the House of Representatives and the Senate of Nigeria are higher than those earned by their peers. Legislators in Nigeria earn more than their peers in the US (\$174,000), France (\$85,908), South Africa (\$104,000), Kenya (\$74,500), Saudi Arabia (\$64,000), and Brazil (\$157,500) per year.

The disparity widens even further when looking at the pay of parliamentarians relative to the GDP per capita. Members of parliament in Nigeria earn 116 times the GDP per capita, whilst their British counterparts earn only 2.7 times. Legislators in lower-income nations, such as Nigeria, receive wages, in contrast to the very modest salary received by their British counterparts. Legislators in Nigeria get a wage that is just three times the national GDP per person, whereas their Australian counterparts earn a salary of \$201,200 per annum, according to the data gathered for this study.

Given the conditions surrounding the new minimum wage, the preceding study has undeniably brought attention to the domineering influence of Nigeria's political elites on the policymaking process. Not only has this scenario shed light on the power elites wield, but it has also shown how they steer the elite policymaking process to serve their own interests. It goes on to demonstrate that political elites and prominent lobbyists, not the "demands of the people," determine public policy in Nigeria. The country's ruling class has consistently used its position

of power to back policies that benefit corporations at the expense of the ordinary Nigerians. The federal and state governments' incapacity to enforce the new minimum wage law is a direct outcome of the ruling class's hypocrisy and lack of political will to enact measures that would benefit Nigerian workers from lower and medium income brackets. The Nigerian Public Service is profoundly affected by this and consequently the department of the country is negatively impacted.

## Discussion

### Corruption among Political Elites and Its Implications for Accountability on Governance in Nigeria

Accountability in government has been severely impacted by the widespread corruption within Nigeria's political class. A vicious loop of ineffectiveness and citizen dissatisfaction ensues as a result of this corruption, which erodes public trust and endangers the integrity of institutions.

#### Extent of Corruption among Political Elites

- **Pervasive Unethical Behaviour:** There are several sorts of corruption in Nigeria, such as nepotism, bribery, and embezzlement. There is a yearly loss of billions of dollars due to corruption and the political elites frequently use their positions for personal benefit (Transparency International, 2021). It will be difficult to uproot this systemic corruption since it is deeply ingrained in the political culture.

#### Implications for Accountability in Governance

- **Erosion of Public Trust:** Government institutions have lost a lot of credibility due to the widespread corruption among political leaders. Ibeanu (2020) found that citizens' perception of their leaders as self-serving reduces their desire to participate in government procedures. People may become disinterested and neglect their civic duties as a result of this mistrust.
- **Weakening of Institutional Integrity:** Corruption undermines the integrity of institutions that are meant to uphold accountability and transparency. When political elites manipulate institutions for personal gain, it compromises their ability to function effectively. For instance, the judiciary and law enforcement agencies often become tools of the elites, further eroding public confidence (Adeleke, 2020).
- **Impediments to Development:** Corruption diverts resources away from essential public services, impacting development outcomes. Funds that could be used for education, healthcare, and infrastructure are often siphoned off, leading to inadequate service delivery and stunted economic growth (Nwankwo, 2019). This cycle of corruption and under-development perpetuates poverty and inequality.

**Challenges to Democratic Governance:** Corrupt political elites' manipulation of election procedures erodes democracy's bedrock. Governments that are unable to meet the requirements of their citizens are a direct result of election fraud and other forms of corrupt influence (Okoli & Onah, 2002). The current state of affairs encourages political instability and poses the risk of civil disturbance.

There are serious obstacles to government accountability in Nigeria due to the high level of corruption among the country's political elites/leaders. Corruption like this breaks the faith of the people and weakens institutions, which in turn slows down progress, makes development and democratic rule more difficult.

## **Relationship Between Elite Behaviour & Socio-Economic Inequalities in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the behaviour of the political elites significantly influences socio-economic inequalities. The interests and actions of these elites often contribute to the marginalization of certain groups, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion. This relationship is critical to understanding the broader implications for social cohesion and national development.

### **Elite Behavior & Its Impact on Socio-Economic Inequalities**

**Resource Allocation and Economic Disparities:** Political elites often control access to resources, which can lead to unequal distribution based on favoritism or nepotism. For example, elites' interests in the oil-rich Niger Delta region have resulted in substantial wealth accumulation for a few, while local communities continue to experience poverty and environmental degradation (Ibeanu, 2019). This disparity creates significant economic inequalities between regions and social groups.

**Policy Formulation Favouring Elites' Interests:** Policies are frequently designed to benefit the elites rather than the general populace. For instance, tax incentives and subsidies often favor large corporations owned by political elites, while small businesses struggle to survive (Adeleke, 2020). Such policies exacerbate socio-economic inequalities, as they fail to address the needs of marginalized groups, particularly in rural areas.

**Manipulation of Democratic Processes:** Elites behavior often undermines democratic processes, leading to the marginalization of certain groups. Electoral manipulation and violence can disenfranchise voters, particularly in regions where elites' interests conflict with the aspirations of marginalized communities (Okoli & Onah, 2002). This manipulation perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, as marginalized groups are unable to influence policies that affect their lives.

### **Consequences of Elites Interests on Marginalized Groups**

**Social Exclusion:** The prioritization of elites' interests leads to the social exclusion of marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged populations. These groups often lack representation in political decision-making, further entrenching their marginalization (Ibeanu, 2019).

**Increased Poverty Levels:** The focus on elites' interests contributes to rising poverty levels among marginalized communities. As resources are diverted to favour the elites, essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure remain under funded in areas that need them the most (Adeleke, 2020). This lack of investment perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality.

**Social Unrest and Conflict:** The marginalization of certain groups has led to various social unrests and conflicts. Discontent among marginalized populations often results in protests and violence, as seen in various regions of Nigeria where communities have risen against perceived injustices and neglect (Nwankwo, 2021). This unrest can destabilize communities and hinder national development.

The relationship between elites' behaviour and socio-economic inequalities in Nigeria is complex and deeply intertwined. The interests of political elites often contribute to the marginalization of certain groups, exacerbating poverty and social exclusion.

## Suggestions

The following are suggested based on the observations and discussion of this research study:

**Removal of the Immunity Clause from Nigerian Constitution:** It is our candid opinion that the immunity clause in the Nigerian Constitution be removed, because a situation where an individual is allowed to loot the commonwealth of the people for 8 (eight) years and at the end will go free in most cases does not create room for national development.

**Strengthen Anti-Corruption Measures:** The various anti-corruption Agencies should be really empowered to investigate and prosecute corruption without political interference.

**Enhance Whistleblower Protections:** Implement robust protection for whistleblowers to encourage reporting of corrupt practices.

**Promote Good Governance and Accountability:** Regularly conduct audits of government programmes and expenditures to ensure accountability and transparency.

**Encourage Public Participation:** Foster mechanisms for citizen engagement in policy-making processes to hold political elites accountable.

**Reform Electoral Processes:** Strengthen the Electoral Commission's Independence by ensuring that the electoral body really operates independently to conduct free and fair elections.

**Introducing Technology in Voting:** Utilize technology to enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral process by reducing opportunities for fraud.

**Invest in Socio-Economic Development:** Invest in critical infrastructure such as education, healthcare, and transportation to improve living standards and economic opportunities.

**Support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** Create favourable policies and access to funding for SMEs to stimulate economic growth and job creation.

**Foster Civic Education and Awareness:** Educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities, empowering them to advocate for accountability and good governance.



**Promote Media Freedom:** Support independent media to investigate and report on elite behavior and governance issues, fostering an informed citizenry.

**Encourage Ethical Leadership:** Develop programmes that emphasize ethical leadership and public service values among current and aspiring political leaders.

**Establish Codes of Conduct:** Implement strict codes of conduct for public officials, with clear consequences for violations.

**Support Grassroots Movements and Civil Society:** Provide support to NGOs and community-based organizations that advocate for social justice and accountability.

**Encourage Youth Participation:** To create a fresh crop of change-makers, it is important to get young people involved in government and politics.

## Conclusion

Nigeria's restoration to democratic rule in 1999, wherein its progress has been dictated by the political elites. Nevertheless, they have frequently been accused of acting against the interests of nation's advancement. The elites have put their own and their groups' interests ahead of those of the public, which has resulted in massive corruption, wasteful use of public resources and widening income gaps. This harmful conduct has further entrenched cycles of poverty, marginalization, and social turmoil while undermining public faith in democratic institutions. A dramatic change in Nigeria's political climate is more necessary in the ensuing years to stabilize its economy through introducing new reforms and political policies for alleviating inequalities among citizens by empowering representatives from socially and economically oppressed and / or downtrodden communities. Also, maintaining the utmost transparency in economic distribution and restructure of nation's system for good governance towards containing the unwarranted payoffs and routing the funds for effectively implementing the socio-economic schemes so as to reach the unreached to achieve a holistic development in the near future.

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