

# DEMOCRACY, ELITISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: EXAMPLES FROM NIGERIA

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*The public sphere in Post-colonial Africa has arguably, been dominated by the elite class. This left management of government, governance frameworks and running of the public realm, interests and initiatives, entirely in the hands of the elites, especially the politically exposed elite class. It is, therefore, near impossible, to run informed commentary on governance, democracy and societal governance in Africa without mentioning the pivotal role of both democracy and the elite class especially as a plethora of studies, linked the former, to development. Unfortunately, the embrace of democracy in post-colonial Africa literarily supervised by the elite class, is yet to birth expected development while leaving an unpleasant phase of political reality in its wake. From alleged elite state capture, and rapacious dominance of the public sphere to daring and malignant corruption that continues to undermine development in post-colonial Africa; tongues continue to wag on the very essence of democracy in Africa in the absence of needed development. Relying on quantitative data, this chapter explored the roles of the elite class in the management of democracy in Africa and how that fuels the development is tortion in the continent. The chapter discovered that elite dominance of the political sphere in Africa and Nigeria to be precise, impugns the political process to undermine the inclusive political atmosphere that democracy preaches and needs to drive the development al process. It was further discovered that rather than the pursuit of a united front that requires the collapse of primordial fault lines towards nation-building, consolidation of democracy and achievement of national development, the emergent elite class used and continues to use primordial ties to divide the people while plundering the commonwealth to satiate narrowly conceived economic and political interest. The chapter recommends strengthening vital state institutions and intentional overhaul of democratic principles to conform to peculiar Africans scenarios to achieve that democracy-development' situation in Africa.*

**KEYWORDS:** Democracy, Elites, Primordial interest, Corruption, Development, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Post-colonial Africa arguably, struggles with the efficient management of the public realm in the interest of all. This apparent failure has resulted, in parts, in the hijack of the public institutional frameworks by politically exposed individuals that continue to undermine the collective context of democracy as a governance model adopted by a majority of post-colonial African states. This has spurred active debate about the whole essence of governance concerning the extent to which it involves the people and who benefits by extension. The conversation, besides involving the core issue of development, entails who controls what, when, and how; reminiscent of Laswell's cherished perception of politics, (Laswell, 1936).

This brings on the critical issue of the elite class in the governance process as they play vital roles in governance, democracy, and development not just in Africa but globally. According to Sebudubudu & Molutsi (2011), the elite groups are a critical factor in national development. This brings attention to the core democracy, governance, and development discourse in post-colonial Africa, where the majority feel alienated from the scheme of things in the public realm due to the rapacious activities of the elite class in Africa, (Booth, 2009).

Liberal and representative democracy by extension, promotes effective participation in the governance process via proxy. This manifests in the elaborate process of elections and the formation of government. This brings to focus the role every segment of society must play to grow and sustain the democratic process and the eventual government constituted to champion the development course. Western democracy encourages participation in the process, the outcome, and all it takes to champion national development. This appeared to have influenced Ajayi and Ojo (2014) to see democracy as 'rule by the people,' reinforcing the inclusive nature of democracy as a mechanism of governance because it encourages a broader spectrum of participation in the political process and outright governance structure. The inclusivity in most post-colonial states, however, comes with a prize, which is the overt elite dominance of not just the political system but the full spectrum of the public realm where decisions on who gets what, when, and how emanate.

He who controls the government in Africa not only wields profound influence but also determines the fate of the people. This appears to negate the very essence and definition of democracy which, according to Riker (1965:31), is "a form of government in which the rulers are fully responsible to the ruled to realize self-respect for everybody," while Schmitter (2003) believes that democracy presents a "regime or system of government in which rulers are held accountable for their action in the public domain by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and co-operation of their representatives."

If the reverse is the case, as it appears in Africa due to the undue influence of the elite class, not just the government but development also suffers. As elites dominate the public sphere, the people are alienated from the scheme of things to impoverish democracy, governance, and undermine development. This brings the issue of elitism and the whole debate about who controls the political and democratic process in Africa to bear

Seen and understood as individuals occupying prime and enviable positions in society due to the influence they wield solely and as a collective, the elite class shape the contour of the public realm.

The elite are the minority but powerful and influential members of society who occupy powerful positions with access to the commonwealth. Their actions in both the political and economic realms, developmental process, and shape the society. According to Otite (2007), the various categories of elite comprising professionals or experts in their different fields neither wield influence that significantly impacts the society. Those with heightened influence and corridors of power and influence, like the ruling elite, usually influence the society more significantly. Their range from who occupies government, who takes what, when and how, as well as the actual decisions on the development pathways because the elite groups hold the public realm and development in post-colonial Africa literally hostage due to what Abdulhamid and Shehu (2020) referred to as 'elite collusion.'

This invariably affects not just the governance and development process that democracy is primed to birth but the stability of the whole spectrum of governance that requires inclusion to run the state in the interest of all and mutually beneficial. As noted by Walker, (1966), "Stable democracy was the consequence of an agreement among the politically active citizenry and their governors on certain fundamental policies and basic values, and widespread acceptance of democratic procedures and restraints on political activity." Undue elite influence, which Shapland, Paassen, and Almekinders (Undated) called elite capture, is increasingly becoming a recurrent decimal in the political landscape of the continent. This has impacted democracy and development negatively with unintended consequences of growing 'self-alienation' from the political process by the people that 'Western democracy' expects to participate in the process to birth inclusive governance and development. Although Mbecke (2017) holds that the 'elitist paradigm and the elite theory might not help solve the failure of Africa to develop and to achieve total independence,' it is imperative to note and understand the domineering roles the post-colonial elite plays in both politics, governance, development process, and economic life in Africa. This invariably shapes public policies and the larger developmental spectrum that either stifle or encourage development in post-colonial Africa.

Post-colonial Africa arguably has complex political, social, and economic dynamics due to the intricate socio-political milieu and interdependence, which Mbecke (2017) called a vicious circle of interdependent relationships that exist in most post-colonial states where the elite class have firm affiliation with neo-colonial forces that amplifies established globalization networks. The social class structure is, therefore, intriguing and often a subject of scholarly investigation as it connects the polity, public policies, and the developmental discourse among and for people facing avoidable lack amidst plenty, Eghweree (2016). This is particularly intriguing as the development discourse in Africa, besides attracting scholarly attention, leaves scholars with one inevitable conclusion: poverty amidst plenty (Eghweree, 2016; Muhammad, 2019; Sanusi, 2010; Guga, 2014).

In Nigeria, the impact and influence of the elite groups are palpable in both the governance and development process. Democracy is not only in the hands of the politically exposed elites; they also shape the governance and developmental processes. This has led to many questions than answers, especially as the developmental process appears moribund and far from realization. This has created an alternative reality to what development means, which Sen (1999) sees as freedom or what Eghweree's (2016) sees as 'embracing the whole gamut of processes that lead to the enhancement of the living standard of any society to make it achieve an acceptable minimum standard that can sustain life, guarantee equality and freedom needed for the good life.' The

situation appears oblivious to what development entails as the elite class appear to have jettisoned what it takes to make governance and development process a collective affair. That portrays a picture of self-serving elites usually out to secure and protect their narrowly conceived political and economic interests, Tsheola and Molefe (2019).

This chapter relies on secondary data and the thematic thrusts of both elite and dual publics to explore the role of elitism in the democratic and developmental process in Nigeria. It paid attention to the issue of elite dominance of both the political, democratic, and developmental discourse in Nigeria. This is done with the understanding that the political and developmental contours of the country, despite being the exclusive preserve of a few, are in unenviable shape. This mirrored against evident malignant group elite interest tangle shaping nation-building efforts in post-colonial Nigeria. The chapter is divided into four major sections with suitable sub-sections created to achieve the needed flow and understanding. The first is the introduction, followed by conceptual and theoretical discourse. The third section examines the elite state capture and development in Nigeria and how that shapes politics, democracy, and development broadly and in the Nigerian context, while the fourth section concludes the chapter with recommendations made on how to mitigate the effects of ethnic politics on both democracy and development in Nigeria.

## **CONCEPTUALANDTHEORETICALDISCOURSE**

Democracy irrespective of where it is practised requires popular participation and broad inclusion in the governance process. Elite dominance of politics and the issue of inclusion in the larger spectrum of the Nigerian political process has attracted reasonable research attention. To aptly understand the issues at stake, some of the concepts such as democracy, elitism, governance, and development, would be carefully examined. These would be followed by a brief discourse of democracy and development generally and in the Nigerian context. The effort is made to examine how the elitism and democracy discourse shape both governance and development in the Nigerian context.

## **DEMOCRACY**

As a concept in the Social Sciences, democracy arguably has a fluid conceptualization, especially when attempting a definition. Although it is associated with Abraham Lincoln, a former American president who conceived it as “government of the people, by the people and for the people,” what democracy means and connotes primes inclusivity in the management of governance and public affairs by extension. Democracy provides an opportunity for people to be involved in the process of governance at different levels. This gives an expected sense of belonging, which endears them to the civic public, which represents the collective interest of all. This is particularly instructive in a multicultural setting with multiple political demographics and shades of interest, desires, and aspirations. This appeared to have influenced Ajayi and Ojo (2014) to define democracy as ‘rule by the people,’ reinforcing the inclusive nature of democracy as a mechanism of governance because it encourages a broader spectrum of the people to participate in the political process and established governance structure.

According to Riker (1965:31), democracy is "a form of government in which the rulers are fully responsible to the ruled to realize self-respect for everybody." This suggests popular participation in the formation of government and how it works. In a similar vein, Schmitter (2003) believes that

democracy presents a “regime or system of government in which rulers are held accountable for their action in the public domain by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and co-operation of their representatives,” while Appadorai (1974) saw same as ‘the system, either of government under which the people exercise governmental power directly or indirectly through representatives elected by them.’ Both definitions gave support to the fundamental ideals of democracy as a form of government with an inherent inclusive capacity to accommodate all and sundry in both the formation of the government and how same is piloted. This is particularly crucial in multi-cultural and undifferentiated societies found in most developing countries of the Global South.

While Musa (2011) believes that democracy is built on the principle of equality of citizens with enshrined freedom to both associate and pursue unique interests, the influence of the elite class appears to change the dynamics. The equality principle reinforces the freedom of the citizens to choose between the different political platforms and candidates (Egbue, Uche, and Okan, 2014). This is reflective of the democratic process, especially the liberal variant where representative governance is a norm. Equality in the democratic process makes it possible to achieve majority rule and fair representative minority rights whenever periodic elections sacrosanct in democratic states are held (Oke, 2005). This is arguably guaranteed in liberal democracy, which Nigeria and most democratic states in modern times practice. This guides against elite and majoritarian autocracy to the detriment of minority groups (Tsheola and Molefe, 2019). Although Doomen (2014) noted that effective legal frameworks in representative democratic states ensure equality and make it difficult for dominance of the political space, existential realities reveal undue advantage of the elite class. This has led to excess control of the democratic space and governance by extension to the exclusion of the masses. As Garba (2020:1) noted:

“The control of Political power by the elites in Nigeria guarantees access to State resources which the elites use to manipulate and command loyalty and obedience from the lower class (masses). As such, the Nigerian State is regulated and controlled by the elites who occupy top positions in government and are constitutionally empowered to make and enforce policies and laws. The State in Nigeria, therefore, is an institution that protects the interests of the elites and dispenses economic patronage to the elites.”

While democracy has become an increasingly popular form of government in post-colonial Africa, the democratic journey can arguably be said to be a tumultuous one in most African states. In Nigeria, the journey had a fresh start on May 29th, 1999, when the nation returned to democratic paths after decades of military incursion and consequent rule. To so many people, the military, besides being an aberration anywhere, reversed all known civil rules of governmental engagement and institutional build-ups. Before the 1999 return to democracy, Nigeria had a stint with the Westminster democracy model from 1960 to January 15, 1966, before the military coup that ushered in military rule until 1979 when the American-styled presidential democracy with the adoption of the executive president. The experiment didn't last as another military coup occurred in December 1983 to abort the democratic system. This lasted till 1989 when democracy returned with a constitution that heralded the Third Republic. According to Abdullahi (2016), the 1989 constitution was similarly patterned after the United States democratic model with provisions for an executive president, a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary, and a free press. This also included prized democratic principles of separation of powers, checks and balances,

fundamental rights, and civil liberty principles the 1999 constitution also upheld to return the nation fully to democratic governance after military dominance of the polity.

After years of military rule, the eventual return to democracy in Nigeria arguably deviated from core democratic principles as elitist control of the polity became evident. This manifests in the apparent compromise of vital state institutions expected to ensure the inclusive political process that Western democracy preaches. This consequently birthed a situation that led to the incapacity of the state to manage the diversity of interest among the varied demographics, especially between the common man and the elite class. These political elites in Nigeria are a conglomeration of individuals who occupy and/or once occupied strategic positions in all the political, economic, and social institutions in the country. These individuals collectively make policies that affect the life chances of every Nigerian (Bolarinwa & Osuji, 2022). This has led to the recurrent issues of minority and inclusion in the political system as regards who controls and dominates the polity. Against the inclusion principle cherished in democracy, the elite class in the military era created, primed exclusion, authoritarianism, and overt centralization of governmental powers to make the occupation of political offices purely for self-serving gains of material acquisition as opposed to an expected platform for service (Ogbeide & Aghahowa, 2005). This has an impact on the political, democratic, and developmental process with the avoidable struggle for relevance between the elite class and the common man. This, in most cases, fuels ethnic and regional struggles that make manifest the battle between the civic and primordial public. This roller-coaster kind of situation directly questions how democracy has impacted the nation's developmental trajectory and ability to consolidate the democratic experience since 1999.

Although the return to democracy in 1999 and the successful transfer of political power from one political party to another can arguably be seen as a milestone, it is vital to note that little progress has been made in the political system. Besides elite-dominated and stifled public, political, and democratic space, Nigerian democracy oscillates between consolidation and regression (Ashindorbe and Danjibo, 2022). This has made the chances of democratic consolidation very slim. Elite dominance and relative exclusion of the mass public from the democratic process since 1999 contribute to the political malaise in the country in the face of the democratic experiment.

From the foregoing, we can establish the issue of elitism and the democratic process and how that shapes the political and development process in Nigeria. This revealed how same shapes the democratic process in Nigeria to deny purposeful governance needed for meaningful democratic and developmental process. Democracy helps form inclusive governance mechanisms that can drive development. That explains why countries around the world embrace democratic ethos as a leeway to development. According to Ardo (2000:2), democracy is fast spreading due to its ability to provide basic requirements for good governance and development. This position is also supported by other scholars who established a link between democracy and good governance that ultimately delivers development. This cannot be excused from the fact that democracy is equipped with all it takes to entrench and consolidate good governance through the various institutional arrangements and expected citizens' participation to drive a healthy political system that can deliver on development (Oke, 2005). Elite dominance of the public, political, and democratic space, as it is in the Nigerian context, stifles the developmental process because of the narrow interest the elite class is bound to pursue. This has negatively impacted the development of the nation as briefly examined below.

## ELITISM

The elite concept in the Social Sciences has roots in the sociological discourse of class relations, control, dominance, and harmonious relations in society. That explains why the focus is often on the political dominance of the "rich," the "landlord class," and the "economic oligarchy," and for Latin American countries, evident class differences and exploitations between wealthy few and many poor masses in the middle ages where feudalism held sway to pave the way for the bourgeois class and the proletariat in society.

Associated with Pareto and Mosca, who postulated on the place of the ruling class in society, the elite theoretical construct postulates that in every society, a small group of people called the 'elite' determines what happens and who benefits. That explains why in Political Science, governance, and management of the public realm generally, the elite theory emphasizes that the will of the few powerful elites prevails in determining policy direction in a country. Elite, besides having a distinct social hierarchy in society, represents 'a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that control a large amount of power', Okeke (2017). This brings to the fore the issue of how society is configured into groups with access to power and those alienated from power, control, and influence, which is at the core of political, democratic, and governance discourse, especially when the principle of inclusion and exclusion is under focus.

Arguably a derivative of the elite theory that settles for the fact that society is influenced, controlled, and dominated by the elite group, elitism builds on this assertion that society is a product of inevitable division between and among groups with disproportionate access, influence, and advantage in the control of what should be collectively and mutually beneficial to their advantage. The masses, although expected to play their roles in the democratic and governance process, are alienated from the very process they are a vital part of because they do not decide public policies which, in most post-colonial African states, is the exclusive preserve of the elite class that determines who gets what, when, and how. This translates to who gets what value in society because the upper socio-economic and political strata of the society that the elite class occupies are done in furtherance of their interest and not that of the powerless masses they govern. He who pays the piper dictates the tune in the elite-masses influence and power discourse, literally because, according to Odubajo & Alabi (2014), the elite exercises disproportionate power in occupying; sustaining by prevailing; suppressing by preventing; and effectively manipulating the powerless mass public in the public realm where governance, democracy, and development discourses are anchored.

The choice of elitism as a theoretical lens for this chapter titled 'Democracy, Elitism and Development in Africa: examples from Nigeria,' is because of the central focus of the theory in explaining the core variables in the study. This is particularly instructive when considered against the backdrop of the fact that the control of the political, democratic, and development process is often and usually done by the elite class. This is because they (the elite) are seen to be well-informed about the needs of the people but often pilot public affairs in a manner that satiates disparate and often narrowly conceived economic and political interests. Garba (2020) was emphatic when he observed that 'the elites who occupy top positions in government and are constitutionally empowered to make and enforce policies and law... constitute an institution that protects their interest and dispenses economic patronage to selves.' The inevitable question would

be who shapes the management of the public realm, democracy, governance, and development process as far as power configuration is concerned. This brings the elite discourse and elitism in general as a sufficient theoretical framework for this study that seeks to examine the nexus between elite-dominated democratic systems and development in Nigeria.

### **Elitism, Political Process and Democracy in Nigeria.**

Elitism in the discourse of power, social relations, democracy, and governance provides insights into the intricate power play among groups in the society with vested interest. While the elite class seeks to protect the interest of a select few, the mass public, on the other hand, seeks to survive the crucial exclusion from the public realm, governance, and development process. According to Garba (2020:2):

"The study in Elitism provides an insight into how society is organized and run by a privileged class who control the levers of political power and the economy. The elites constitute a critical component of a political system which dispenses power and authority, including patronage. The 'Elite Theory', as a corollary of elitism, is founded in political sociology on the notion that every society holds a ruling minority, a group that controls and disputes the most important power sources (i.e., conflict and violence). Hence, at the core of the elite theory lie elite behavior, interaction, transformation, and recruitment. These are critical issues embedded in the 'elite theory' which this study sought to expatiate."

Political elitism has come to be seen as 'the political activities and determinism placed on the nation-state by the political elite,' Bolarinwa & Osuji (2022). Political elitism can be traced to Plato's categorization of the ruling class in *The Republic*. This impacts the democratic and governance process negatively, with multiplier effects on nation-building in general. Political elites, according to Ogbeide and Aghahowa (2005:222), include politically exposed and influential individuals that may include the President, Vice President, State Governors, Deputy Governors, Local Council Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, Federal and State Legislators, Judges of the High Judiciary, Officers Corps (both serving and retired in the armed forces), the police, political parties, and leaders of industries.

The political process and landscape in Nigeria have been dominated by the elite class. From 1999, when the Fourth Republic began, military elites and privileged business elites have taken charge of the political space, serving in various capacities to the exclusion of the mass public. This has created a unique culture of deliberate exclusion from the political process and governance system that 'weaponizes' poverty to make vulnerable, impoverish, and exclude the mass public from both the public, governance, and development process, Ogbeide and Aghahowa (2005). This is also reflected in the grassroots political process, arguably hijacked by the ruling elites to undermine democratic principles of equality and inclusion, Okeke (2017).

Political elites have unfettered access to the commonwealth and a large spectrum of political enterprise that safely can be seen as the 'patronage politics' in Nigeria. This is ironically rooted in the allocation of disproportionate benefits to people who should equally benefit from the commonwealth. As Garba (2020:1) succinctly noted:



“The control of political power by the elites in Nigeria guarantees access to state resources, which the elites use to manipulate and command loyalty and obedience from the lower class (masses). As such, the Nigerian state is regulated and controlled by the elites who occupy top positions in government and are constitutionally empowered to make and enforce policies and laws. The state in Nigeria, therefore, is an institution that protects the interest of the elites and dispenses economic patronage to the elites.”

The role of the elites in the Nigerian context helps shed light on the interplay of internal group dynamics and how that shapes the democratic, governance, and developmental process, which Eghweree (2016) observed, is in a precarious situation as the nation reels in an unenviable position as the poverty capital of the world. This creates a situation where apparent state capture occurs with consequent instability in the political process. Stable democracy occurs when stakeholders in the political process agree on basic values and principles sacrosanct to the democratic process (Walker, 1966). The absence of such agreement leads to elite dominance of the process and the exclusion of the mass public from the process. This ultimately leads to what Abdulhamid & Shehu (2020) called elite collusion to undermine both governance and development in Nigeria, or what Tsheola and Molefe (2019) called ‘despotic autocratism,’ which loosely translates to the failure of state apparatus rather than the single individuals and social groups that are commonly blamed and prosecuted for corruption and political violence in international courts of law. This stifles both democracy and development, with the essence of governance compromised ultimately.

This appears to be the case in Nigeria as 'elitist capture' of the political, economic, democratic, and developmental process has left underdevelopment and institutional fragility in its wake (Okeke, 2017; Odubajo & Alabi, 2014; Abdulhamid & Shehu, 2020; and Bolarinwa & Osuji, 2022).

## **DEVELOPMENT**

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The role of the elites in the Nigerian context helps shed light on the interplay of internal group dynamics and how that shapes the democratic, governance, and developmental process. Eghweree (2016) observed that the nation is in a precarious situation as it reels in the unenviable position of being the poverty capital of the world.

This creates a situation where apparent state capture occurs, leading to instability in the political process. Stable democracy occurs when stakeholders in the political process agree on basic values and principles sacrosanct to the democratic process (Walker, 1966). The absence of such agreement leads to elite dominance of the process and the exclusion of the mass public.

This ultimately leads to what Abdulhamid & Shehu (2020) called elite collusion to undermine both governance and development in Nigeria, or what Tsheola and Molefe (2019) referred to as 'despotic autocracy.' This loosely translates to the failure of state apparatus rather than the actions of individual social groups commonly blamed for corruption and political violence in international courts of law.

This stifles both democracy and development, with the essence of governance compromised. This appears to be the case in Nigeria as 'elitist capture' of the political, economic, democratic, and

developmental process has left underdevelopment and institutional fragility in its wake (Okeke, 2017; Odubajo & Alabi, 2014; Abdulhamid & Shehu, 2020; Bolarinwa & Osuji, 2022).

## **ELITISM, DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

The public realm and all it takes to manage the same are usually intriguing. That explains why focus is often placed on all it takes to effectively manage political power, which encompasses the superstructure and base structure of society. Laswell's (1936) ideation of politics as 'who gets what, when, and how' comes alive when the management of the public realm is under scrutiny.

This brings the issue of who is who and who benefits what within the full spectrum of group and interest struggles in the political process. The elite democracy and governance discourse leaves one question largely unanswered, and that is the question of how governance has been used to galvanize the political and development process.

Governance is key to effective societal management as well as intricate group politics that elitism-influenced democratic processes represent. As Fosu (2018) noted, governance is vital for development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The situation is not different in Nigeria, where the political process appears enmeshed in the intricate rivalry between the ruling class and the mass public, arguably alienated from the political, economic, democratic, and governance processes.

Governance can safely be said to entail the whole gamut of how public trust, or power by extension, is exercised in the management of a country's resources to achieve definite goals that usually cascade into development. It covers the whole spectrum of traditions and institutions by which political and bureaucratic authority is exercised in a country.

As Rufai (2014) noted, this includes the process of selecting governments, monitoring and replacing governments, as well as the capacity to equitably and effectively formulate and implement mutually beneficial policies to guarantee the rights of all and the health of established institutions needed to engineer healthy economic and social interactions.

This means governance could either be good or bad depending on how effective it is in managing divergent interests in the polity. Good governance must, of necessity, entail 'making decisions and exercising power over people either in towns/villages, states, institutions, and countries in a fair, equitable, and inclusive manner that guarantees the rights of all and the sustenance of established institutions and social structures.'

While crafting what good governance entails, Hardoon and Heinrich (2013) singled out "accountability, transparency, enhanced public participation in decision-making, strengthened public sector and civil society institutions, and greater adherence to the rule of law" as immutable variables one should look out for to safely classify any administrative system as either good or bad.

On the other hand, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1997) also hinged good governance on structures and institutions that are effective, inclusive, people-oriented, and development-geared, assuring a scale to measure good governance in any political system.

Every society would rise or fall based on the type, quality, and calibre of leadership and governance system. Post-colonial Africa, and Nigeria in particular, has had to struggle with a leadership crisis and deficit governance due to the preponderance of the elitist ruling class that has made the democratic and governance system almost their exclusive preserve.

As Mbecke (2017) noted, ‘Africa is a victim of the current westernized globalization and that political elitism has been an obstacle—rather than an opportunity—for the attainment of socio-economic expansion and total independence.’ This is reflected in the constitution, structure, and direction of governance in Africa, and Nigeria to be precise.

Democracy is arguably equipped with all it takes to birth good governance that would guarantee inclusion and effective collaboration to drive mutually beneficial development. The reverse appears to be the case in Africa, and Nigeria to be precise, as democracy is hijacked by the elite class.

Lopez (2013) conceived the elite class as individuals with the capacity, personality, and skills to pilot group affairs often in a disproportionate manner. They, in return, pursue narrowly conceived group interests to the exclusion of the common man. This ultimately stifles the governance process and trumps development.

What this means is that democracy, although expected to give equal opportunity, is hindered by the elite factor, making disproportional operational capacity among the people a common thing. Aissaoui (1999) minced no words interrogating the assumed equality that democracy promotes among group demographics where the elite class plays vital roles in shaping the course of governance and development:

“If there is no equal sharing of goods, there can be no equal sharing of power. So, for me, this equal sharing is crucial to the definition of democracy. If democracy is the right to have a decent life, health, education, freedom, and security, then I am a democrat. But I am questioning whether this is the case in some of the biggest democracies in the world today.”

Said (2000) re-echoed a similar sentiment when he queried the nexus between democracy and development in Africa. Although his study didn't delve into the group dynamics and all that shape the democratic, governance, and development process in Africa, it is safe to note that the elite class and their influence, capacity, and manifest intentions to dominate the public realm to their advantage are critical factors.

Democracy succeeds when its cherished principles of inclusion and equality are observed in principle and practice. This appears suspended in Nigeria as the polity is dominated by the ruling elites. This is what political elitism espouses.

Political elites, and the elite class in general, are persons with more power, wealth, status, and privileges than the majority of the people (Field & Higley, 1980:69). This situation creates incompatibility with freedom and equality in society. According to Mbecke (2017), the unequal relationship between the elite class and the citizenry has negative impacts not just on democracy but on the entire governance system and consequently on socio-economic development.

This is the situation in Africa and Nigeria, to be precise, as seen through the discursive lens of this study thus far. In the Nigerian context, both democratic and governance systems are elite-dominated (Garba, 2020; Ogbeide & Aghahowa, 2005; Odubajo & Alabi, 2014).

This has birthed a political culture that thrives on the near-deployment of violence to the exclusion of the people needed to form inclusive governance for people-oriented development. While ‘elite state capture’ may be appropriate to describe the unfolding political culture of elite dominance of both democracy and governance to stifle development in Nigeria, little is said about the inevitable impact on citizenship rights to participate in the political process.

This is made worse and likely to be perpetuated as the elite culture of ‘self-perpetuation,’ which Garba (2020) referred to as ‘elite circulation,’ is already unfolding. This has taken various shapes and forms ranging from elites replacing themselves with their biological children or politically anointed lackeys in positions of dominance, especially in the political system.

This has the trappings of an undemocratic culture and is capable of undermining equality and inclusion, which are cornerstones of democracy to build a virile governance system equipped with all it takes to champion the course of development.

## **CONCLUSION**

Democracy, class relations, governance, and development discourse in post-colonial Africa has been an interesting academic exercise. This is due in part to the fluid nature of social relations in Africa. While it is safe to agree with Mbecke (2017) that post-colonial Africa has complex political, social, and economic dynamics due to the intricate interdependence, little is said about the inherent relationship between the privileged few and the alienated mass public who are increasingly becoming ‘bystanders’ in the democratic, political, and development process.

This ‘vicious circle of interdependent relationships’ that exists between post-colonial states, the elite class, and the masses, has made governance unproductive while stifling efforts made at achieving needed development. This cannot be divorced from the fact that the social class structure that is complex and intriguing has been taken advantage of by the ruling elites to the detriment of the masses and inclusive governance needed for development. Governance must be owned by the people to accept public policies geared towards development before one can celebrate and not the unsavoury situation in post-colonial Africa where the people face avoidable lack amidst plenty (Eghweree, 2016).

## **Democracy, Governance, and Development Discourse in Nigeria**

Democracy, governance, and development discourse in Nigeria is not in any way different from what obtains in post-colonial Africa. Elite dominance and willful alienation from the political process by the people, and stifled developmental hopes, are fast becoming commonplace. The bulging elite culture of ‘self-perpetuation,’ which Garba (2020) referred to as ‘elite circulation’ mentioned earlier, is increasingly becoming the norm in the Nigerian democratic and governance space.

This trend, if unchecked, would seal the fate of the common man in the political process and put development perpetually on hold as the 'elite-dominated political system' is often corrupt with the vicious capacity to vitiate developmental initiatives (Idoko et al., 2016; Page, 2018; Toakodi & Assi, 2016; Agbibo & Maiangwa, 2012).

### **Political Corruption and Governance**

Political corruption occurs usually at the highest echelon of leadership in any politically organized society. This is reflected in compromises at every facet of the society on things that should matter, such as the inalienable right of the people to participate in the political process unfettered.

Though it has varying shades from one society to another depending on the level of maturity and development, it can be reduced to 'abuse of political office for personal gains,' reminiscent of elite-dominated political and democratic processes that disproportionately favour the various political demographics in the Nigerian political system.

According to Mark (2015), he crafted a meaning for corruption in politics when he noted that it:

“occurs where a public official (A) violates the rules and/or norms of office, to the detriment of the interests of the public (B) (or some sub-section thereof) who is the designated beneficiary of that office, to benefit themselves and a third party (C) who rewards or otherwise incentivizes A to gain access to goods or services they would not otherwise obtain.”

This is the unpleasant situation in Nigeria where political elitism shrinks the democratic and political space against the mass public while having unhindered access to the commonwealth with reckless displays of wealth, influence, and capacity to tilt decisions on what to do in the public realm, to their favour and advantage.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Based on findings from this study, the following recommendations are made on how to tame the growing elite capture of democracy, governance, and development processes to the exclusion of the common man in Nigeria. It is hoped that if these steps are taken, the ideal democratic principles of equality and inclusion will be restored to run a people-oriented political process that would develop needed attention to the benefit of all.

1. Institutional overhaul and strengthening. This would make it difficult for a segment of society to hijack the process to the exclusion of others. This would help engender an inclusive political atmosphere to birth development in Nigeria.
2. There should be mass political education in Nigeria to ignite the right kind of political consciousness in the public. This would stir interest in the public realm and awaken people from willful political alienation.
3. There should be intentional and massive investment in poverty eradication programs to enhance the people's self-worth so that they won't remain vulnerable and a ready tool for the rampaging elite class desirous of capturing the public realm for their narrowly conceived interest.

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