

An Interrogation of the Elite Theory and Political Elite Recruitment in Nigeria: A Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper tried to interrogate the Political Elite Theory, its application and relevance to the political elite recruitment process in Nigeria. It is a fact that, despite the democratic regimes experienced in Nigeria over the years, the political leadership recruitment process is still determined by, and skewed in favour of a few. This calls for such question as; could the elite theory be said to be applicable and relevant in Nigerian politics? In its conceptual explication, the paper gave an analysis of the elite theory and further enunciated its principles, tenets, ideas, assumptions and application. The essence was to determine the relevance of the theory in political elite recruitment process in the country. Following from this, the Elite Theory stood as the theoretical framework of analysis. The study critically discussed the elite recruitment process in Nigeria and proceeded to finding the relevance of the Elite Theory in the elite recruitment process in Nigeria. Through robust analysis, the study found that, most of the assumptions of the elite theory are very real and relevant in Nigerian politics today as the flaws, manipulations and anti-democratic tendencies are in allusion to basic assumptions or ideas of political elite theory. The paper therefore concluded that the elite theory is very apt, applicable and relevant as a framework of analysis for political elite recruitment in Nigeria. The study also noted that, it is the observation and operationalization of some of these assumptions that has corrupted politics in Nigeria and recommended among others that political offices in the country should be made less attractive so as to reduce the level of competition over such offices.

Keywords: Elite, Elite Theory, Recruitment, Political Elite

Introduction

System survival no doubt is a function of the level of socialization of the people vis-à-vis the utilization of acceptable patterns of recruiting actors that would steer the political system, the level of political socialization and the nature of recruiting process based on political culture serve as a functional regulatory mechanism for system survival. This however, could be said to be a major characteristic of matured political systems which tend to impact positively on system survival and by implication political and economic development (Akpotor 2007, p.21). Conversely, in third world countries such as Nigeria, the inconsistent nature of political culture arising from political instability has witnessed devices at sustaining political stability or system survival in the case of democracy (Ukaeje 2001, p.10). Such devices in the case of Nigeria, has led to the domination of the democratic space in the Nigerian Fourth Republic by retired military officers in the governance of the Nigerian State. It is also important to emphasize that when retired military officers are not directly involve in governance, just like



the events of the 2007 elections, they are actively involved in determining and imposing political actors on the people. The implication of the above is that a fragile ground for democratic governance is built, because the process for system survival is exclusive of the inputs of the people and the system itself is distorted and dislocated to accommodate a cosmetic arrangement that may not stand the test of time (Abdullah 2007, p.142). Consequently, the leadership recruitment process in the country has been flooded by the elites who are only interested in gaining and consolidating power at the expense of all else. Hence there is the overriding need to critically re-examine the elite theory in relation to the elite character in Nigeria.

One of the most frequent changes in every political system including Nigeria has been the change in class status. This is why in all societies, there are the ones who have power/access to decision-making and the ones who do not have such powers. It is thought-provoking that even in a democratic system as Nigeria in which the power is meant to reside in the demos ('the people'), power is really concentrated in the hands of a few. This apparently was the view of Brezis (2010, p.2), when he argued that "all political organizations, even democracies, tend towards domination by an oligarchy". This, Mills (1956) called "the power elite". Little wonder Robert Michels as far back as 1911 described it as "the iron law of oligarchy". Interpreting the foregoing will mean that, irrespective of the various democratic regimes experienced in Nigeria over the years, the political leadership recruitment process is still determined by, and skewed in favour of a few.

It is thought provoking that some families or names in Nigeria have remained within the corridor of power for a very long time while others struggle to get in and sometimes finds it very difficult. Could the elite theory be at play here? The political elite theory as propounded by some Western scholars as we shall soon see, has been on the lips of scholars and students of politics for decades and has been variously applied in the analysis and understanding of many social phenomena but is it applicable in the political leadership recruitment in the Nigerian political system?

Conceptual Explications

The Concept of Elites/ Political Elites

The term 'elite' was derived from the French and it means something excellent (Gaubas 2003, p.258). Elites may be defined as persons who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially" (Highley 2008, p.3). Fundamentally, all governments have elites at the head. Elites are viewed as essential elements of the political and social life of the country and in every country, the stability of the nation and its regime seem to depend in a large measure on ways in which the elites are organized and fits with the other sectors. There are qualities which constitute the hallmark of competent groups. Essentially, elite formation is legitimated by their identification with the most pervasive goals in society. That is, elites are an embodiment of national consensus (Kia and Vurasi 2013, p.54). Elite therefore is a nexus of need fulfilment that binds situational demands and group membership.

The political elite refers to a group of highly distinguished persons who are characterized by exceptional performance in politics, who effectively utilize or monopolize power and who possess a sense of group cohesion as well as a corresponding esprit de corps. The political elite always excel in the ability to secure power and rule (Ekundayo 2017, p.1).

Burton and Highley (2001, p. 182) define political elites as "the several thousand persons who hold top positions in large or otherwise powerful organizations and movements and who participate in or directly influence national political decision-making". This definition is



uncontroversial: most authors agree that small social groups that concentrate national political decision-making are the backbone of political elites (e.g., Hoffmann-Lange2007; Putnam1976). Political elites have the capacity to dramatically increase and harm the collective wellbeing of society. They control the three powers of the state and therefore give life and manage the institutions that shape intrastate, state-society, and civic society relations. Political elites decide on the use of the monopoly of force, national economic policies, and the relations with other states. Their messages are so important that they have a profound effect on the beliefs and behavior of average citizens (Jacobs and Shapiro2000). In fact, for some scholars, elite values and behavior reflect the quality of democracy. Dahl (1973) claimed that democracy becomes possible only once elites have developed patterns of political competition and can form a government without the fear of suffering violence. Relatedly, several studies have found that in democracies elites are more committed to democratic values than the mass public (Sullivan, 1993; Stein, 1998). In short, like no other group, political elites define the path that a country will follow.

The Concept of Politics

Politics as an issue and phenomenon invokes a lot of variegated opinions and sentiments. Both scholars and charlatans have joined in the controversies, debates, misconceptions and misunderstanding. As rightly noted by Stephen Wasby, "where there is politics, it is said there controversy; where there are issues, there is politics. Where no controversy exists, where no issues are debated, politics does not exist" (cited in Paki & Inokoba, 2006, p.1). Virtually, everyone one has an opinion on the issue of politics. This is understandable because politics as a universal phenomenon affects every one of us in one way or the other.

Different approaches have fundamentally differing views on whether it should be used extensively or limitedly, empirically or normatively, and on whether conflict or co-operation is more essential to it.

On his part, Warren (1999, p. 208) defines politics as the intersection of power and conflict. This definition is useful in that it provides two key sobriquets to identify the political. The first moniker of the political is that some sort of power relationship must exist between two or more individuals, groups, or objects. This power dynamic is exactly what motivates individuals to make political decisions: either to exert power over another for an advantage, or to subvert an existing relationship to achieve an established goal.

It is glaringly clear from the foregoing definitions that politics is a derivative of social relationships entered into by individuals driven or spurred by greed and self-interest as they compete or struggle over access to scarce socio-economic resources. Hence, because individual interests are diametrically opposed, the inevitable outcome of such relationship is conflict. Moreover, the establishment of an institution with authority to make binding decisions to regulate and control human conducts in order to promote harmonious social existence all fall within major concern of politics.

The Elite Theory and its Assumptions

The elite theory can be defined as a set of ideas, principles and assumptions on the concept, structure and exercise of power. It is a theory that inquires about and elucidates on power relationships in the modern society. The theory postulates that a small group of people which can be found in the economic, policy planning and military institutions of the state is vested with overriding power.



Thus, the elite theory is based on two main sets of ideas, principles or assumptions on the concept, structure and exercise of power. Firstly, that power lies in position of authority in key economic, political and military institutions. Secondly, that the psychological difference that sets apart political elite from non-elite is that they have personal resources, for instance, intelligence, skills, and vested interest in government (Mills, 1956). Elite theory is also a theory of the state which seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in a contemporary society. The theory posits that a small minority consisting members of the economic elite, policy planning networks and military institutions holds the most power in any society.

According to the elite theory, the small group of people with overriding power is referred to as the political elite. It is a group of people with exceptional abilities in politics and great monopoly of power. This so-called power elite abounds in all societies and they always have the exceptional ability to secure power, perpetuate it and rule (Friedrich, 2014, p.15).

The following are some basic assumptions of the political elite theory:

- (a) The elite theory stipulates that overriding and ultimate power can be found among the people who hold key positions in the economic, political and military institutions in any society.
- (b) The theory assumes that all men love power. Hence, through the elite theory we are able to understand that those in power do not want to surrender power easily but to hold on to it tenaciously and through any means.
- (c) The theory states that all men are not endowed alike. Hence, the emphasis on the psychological and intellectual superiority obtained by the elite. It further reinforces the psychological, intellectual and other differences that set apart the political elite from the non-elite.
- (d) The theory emphasizes inequality rather than equality in the society. It stresses the belief that the elites are the highest accomplishers in their fields and that the political elite are imbued with personal resources such as social skills, intelligence and special interest in politics.
- (e) The theory divides the society into two different groups because politics is, essentially, a relationship between rulers and the ruled and it is defined in terms of power. It is the ruling class that produces the power elite, the power wielding minority group, in any society.
- (f) The theory emphasizes the rule by the minority over the majority in any society. The society is usually ruled by the political elite, a minority group of achievers in politics who are highly organized, cohesive and will do everything to secure, conserve, preserve and perpetuate its power over a majority that is largely unorganized.

Proponents of the Elite Theory

The elite theory gained prominence in the early twentieth century through the different writings of some sociologists namely Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Robert Michels (1876-1936) Ortega Y. Gasset (1883-1955) and Wright Mills (1916-1962).

Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)

Pareto (1935) stressed the psychological and intellectual superiority obtained by the elite. He believed that the elites are the highest accomplishers in their field and that there are two types of elite: governing elites and non-governing elites. He also opined that a political elite group can be replaced by a new one and that one can circulate from being elite to non-elite and vice versa.

Pareto is well known for developing the concept of circulation of elites. He believes that history is a graveyard of aristocracies. He wrote that in every society, there is an increasing movement of individuals and elites from higher to lower levels and from lower to higher levels resulting in a considerable increase of the degenerate elements in the classes which still hold

power, and on the other hand, in an increase of elements of superior quality in the subject classes (Obi, Nwachukwu & Obiora 2008, p.30). This leads to the ultimate extinction “of every elite group in society. According to Varma (1975, p.145), the dissolution of the elite group makes the social equilibrium – which was Pareto’s central concern-unstable.

Pareto distinguished the various kinds of circulation among the elites. First, between different categories of the governing elite itself, and secondly between the elite and the rest of the population. This second scenario may be as a result of either individuals from the lower strata entering the existing elite and for individuals in the lower strata forming new elite groups and entering into a struggle for power with the existing elite.

Pareto used the concept of residues to explain the factors that lead to the degeneration of the governing elite, destroys the social equilibrium and gives rise to the circulation of elites. ‘Residues’ means the qualities through which an individual can rise in life. He gave a list of six residues but believes that two are most important because it is through them that the elites try to maintain their hold on power. These are ‘combinations’ - (cunning) and persistence of aggregates’ (force).

In explaining the circulation of elites, he observed that it happens through ‘revolutions’. According to him this;

Came about through accumulations in the higher strata of society-either because it is slowing down in class circulation or from other cause of decedent elements no longer possessing the residue, suitable for keeping them in power, or shrinking from the use of force; while in the main time in the lower strata society, elements of superior quality are coming to the fore, possessing residues suitable for exercising the functions of governing and willing enough to use force (Varma 1975, in Dahl 1991, p.146).

Varma concludes his analysis on Pareto by saying that “it was very clear that Pareto was attaching a great deal of importance to the capacity and willingness on the part of the governing elite to use force.

Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941)

Mosca emphasized the sociological and personal characteristics of elites. He said elites are an organized minority and that the masses are an unorganized majority. The ruling class is composed of the ruling elite and the sub-elites. He divided the world into two groups: the ruling class and the class that is ruled (Obi, Nwachukwu & Obiora 2008, p.30). Mosca asserted that elites have intellectual, moral, and material superiority that is highly esteemed and influential.

In his own work titled “The Ruling Class” (1896), Gaetano Mosca, an Italian Sociologist posited that in the history of man, only one type of government existed which is Oligarchy. He argued that;

In all societies-from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawning of civilization down to the most advanced and Powerful Polities-two classes of people appear-a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent and

supplies the first, in appearance at least, with the instrumentalities that are essential to the vitality of the political organism (cited in Gauba 2003, p.259).

Mosca quite unlike Pareto that believes that intelligence and talent are the outstanding qualities of the ruling class, sees organizational capacity as the most outstanding feature of the ruling class. He believes that apart from the fact that the minority is usually composed of superior individuals, the fact of their being few helps them to be more organized. He wrote that; *“The larger the political community, the smaller will be the proportion of the governing minority to be governed by and the more difficult it will be for the majority to organize for reaction against the minority”*.

Mosca like Pareto believes in the circulation of elites. To him, once the ruling class loses its aptitude to command and exercise political control, and those outside the ruling class, develops it in large numbers, they will overthrow the old class and take over. He also believes so much in the role of the middle class in a political system. He labels them the sub-elite. He thus argued that the stability of any political organism depends on the level of morality, intelligence and activity that this second stratum has attained. He believes the policies of the ruling class are made in the interest of the class but couched in a moral and legal garb.

Robert Michels (1876-1936)

Michels in his analysis in his work titled “Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy” (1911), introduced what he called the “Iron law of oligarchy”. According to him, immanent oligarchical tendencies exist in every kind of human organization which strives for the attainment of definite ends (Okonofua, 2013, p.12). Oligarchy is a preordained form of the common life of great social aggregates. The majority of human beings in a condition of eternal tutelage are predestined to submit to the domination in every form of social life. As a movement or party grows in size, more and more functions have members of the organization rendered less competent to direct and control them, as a result of which the officers acquire great freedom of action and a vested interest in their positions. They cling desperately to their new positions and privileges and become almost irremovable.

Michels uses the concept of mass mind to support his position. Majority of human beings are apathetic, indolent and slavish and are permanently incapable of self-governing. They are susceptible to flattery, and weak in the presence of great strength. Leaders take advantage of this to perpetuate themselves in power.

He further opined that social and political organizations are run by a few individuals; that social organizations were elitist; and that elites have three basic principles that help in the bureaucratic structure of political organizations. The three basic principles are: the need for leaders, specialized staff and facilities; utilization of facilities by leaders within their organizations and the importance of the psychological attributes of the leaders

Ortega Gasset (1883-1955)

Ortega Gasset’s theory was that of the masses. He posited that, a nation’s greatness depends on the capacity of the ‘people’ the ‘public’ the ‘crowd’ the ‘masses’ to find their symbol in certain chosen people, on whom it pours out the vast store of its vital enthusiasm (Baba 2007 p.8). He further maintained that a man is effective in society as a whole not so much because of

his individual qualities but because of the social energies which have been deposited in him by the masses.

Wright Mills (1916-1962)

Mills (1956) developed a new sociological perspective on the concept of power in the United States. He discovered a tripod of power groups; political, economic and military- which constitute the most formidable but highly differentiated power-wielding body in the United States. Also corroborating this view, Buttmore (1993) opined that the power-wielding body is identifiable in all advanced industrial societies, whereby the mechanisms of power and overall control are concentrated and funneled into the hands of a limited and small group. Hence, the power groups as identified can serve as veritable tools to analyse the structure and exercise of power as well as its consequences in a modern capitalistic democracy.

Based on the views expressed by the proponents of the elite theory and from the standpoint of other scholars and theorists, the central theme that runs through the theory is the concept, structure and exercise of power in any society. Politics is, essentially, a relationship between rulers and the ruled and it is defined in terms of power which exists between the rulers and the ruled (Tashjean, 2014, p.20). It is the ruling class that produces the power elite, the power wielding minority group, in any society. It is a group of achievers in politics and they are highly organized, cohesive and will do everything to secure, conserve, preserve and perpetuate power. The power elites are present in any society, no matter how small or large, old or new, the society is.

Political Elite Recruitment Process in Nigeria

The question of who leads or rules in any society is always central in politics precisely because power is not evenly distributed. Power is said to be concentrated on the ruling minority otherwise known as the political elite. This is in line with one of the underlying assumptions of the political elite theory. At any given time, some individuals will have more powers than others. However, while scholars and political theorists tend to agree that concentration of powers are inevitable, they differ widely on how individuals or groups gain, maintain, wield and distribute power (Rothman, 2001, p.93). How individuals or groups gain power and become part of the power elite can be referred to as political elite recruitment. This process is well rooted in human history as well as in the history of all hitherto existing societies as Karl Marx would say.

In the beginning, communal life in ancient Africa including the area known today as Nigeria was simple, peaceful and egalitarian but the next stage of development was the emergence of patrimonial societies under the leadership of one ruler (king or chief) who exercised authority over his people supported by tradition and religious beliefs (Rothmans, 200,1 p.93). Traditionally, a male child usually assumed the throne after the demise of the king or chief but where there were many ambitious male contestants to the throne, there would be succession crises. To forestall this, ancient societies did attempt to establish political succession by hereditary right as antidote of succession crisis. However, the hereditary succession mechanism for leadership succession or change and for maintaining social peace was reported to be ineffective even in the ancient world, such as China, Egypt, Rome (Burling, 1974; Service, 1975; Weber, 1978). In the same vein, the hereditary mechanism for choosing rulers was ineffective in maintaining social peace in ancient or pre-colonial Africa which featured a variety of state and non-state formations. In most of these societies, leadership recruitment, succession or change was said to be crisis-ridden (Alemazung, 2010, p.328).



From colonial Africa to date, there have been so much of socio-economic and political restructuring, due to the impact of social forces like western education, bureaucratization of colonial administration, western technology, and the introduction of values associated with the acquisition of specialized modern skills, social mobility through achievement, capital accumulation and democracy (Cooper, 2002, p.117).

Thus, the modernization of African territories has been associated with the rise of 'new' and 'modern' African elites for whom acquisition of new and modern skills, education or capital were the key instrumental values in their rise to prominence.

All these had given rise to new governing elite in all spheres of government, be it legislature, executive and bureaucracy particularly in English and French speaking colonial Africa (Vine, 2014, p.372). This had therefore led to a change in the pattern of political elite recruitment, from traditional to educated elite, which actually began in the colonial era in Africa. The emergence of these new and educated elites, moreover, has been usually accompanied by a corresponding decline in the importance of the traditional elites, who generally owned their positions to ascription as the older criterion of political elite selection.

From the ancient times to date, there are three different major types of political elite recruitment namely: traditional, autocratic and democratic. The traditional and autocratic modes were gradually replaced by the democratic mode. In the postcolonial era, the emergence of democracy has greatly reduced the problem of political leadership succession and dramatically changed the pattern of recruitment into political elite institutions.

In Nigeria, for instance, traditional rulers who held political powers before and during the colonial era steadily lost out in the post-colonial era, as they were gradually phased-out and replaced by educated elites through democratic means. The changing pattern of political elite recruitment, through democracy, was not only peculiar to Nigeria but also was true of other African states. The traditional leaders were replaced by new set of educated people, known as modern educated governing elite, who were consequently recruited into political elite institutions by virtue of their new positions in the legislature, executive and in the government bureaucracy.

It will be strongly emphasised here that the democratic system is the current trend and is adjudged the best method of political elite recruitment in the world today. This is based on strong and competitive political parties that sponsor candidates; credible and transparent electoral management body that organises free and fair elections devoid of rigging and any other malpractices as well as a well-informed electorate that vote candidates as political leaders. Political parties are deemed to be important agencies in making democracies stable particularly as regards political elite recruitment. Hence, fully developed political systems and stable democracies like the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) depend on well institutionalised party systems in which rules and regulations about how political parties contest elections are well spelt-out, laid-down and entrenched.

Political parties do serve as platforms under which individual candidates contest elections. Hence, political parties sponsor candidates for various elective positions across the country and capture majority of the votes by helping their candidates to win support of the electorate and defeat other candidates. This practice continues periodically and regularly based on electoral regulations. Strong democracies benefit from strong political parties which usually attract committed and durable support from the electorate that make them win freely and fairly conducted elections, under the watchful eyes of an impartial umpire (electoral body). This is because strong political parties such as the Democratic Party and the Republican Party of the US



and the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of the UK are well-organised. They have effective communication networks, broad-based social and mass followers, ideological predictability, good connections with interest groups, and possess their own corporate identities independent of the personalities of their founders or leaders. Thus, the democratic method of recruiting political elite as explained above in Europe and America is based on well-structured political parties and free and fair elections.

Unfortunately, such strong political parties as we have in the United States and in the United Kingdom seem not to exist in Nigeria or anywhere in Africa. It is also observed that strong political party system, stable democracy and other essential ingredients such as free and fair election are lacking in Nigeria. The question therefore is, why is it so? This is better analysed or explained by the anti-democratic tendencies or assumptions of political elite theory. Unlike the advanced democracies such as UK, US and Germany as well as some emerging democracies in Africa such as Ghana and South Africa, it is well observed that the process of political elite recruitment in Nigeria, so far, has not been credible and transparent. The electoral process also witnessed godfatherism, militarism, ethnicity, religious bigotry, corruption, intra- and inter-party crises, violence, monetisation, thuggery, rigging, other malpractices and delayed judgments from election tribunals (Ehiabhi&Ehinmore, 2011, p.138).

Similarly, there is lack of intra-party competitions among aspirants seeking political elite positions as they were being imposed by political godfathers. Apart from this, imposition of leaders by godfathers could be responsible for the many crises or threats of impeachment in the Fourth Republic. This has been very rampant during the period as disagreements frequently occurred between the godfathers and their godsons. Classic examples of reported cases were late Lamidi Adedibu and Governor Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja of Oyo State, Chief Chris Uba and Governor Chris Ngige of Anambra State and a host of others (Oni, 2012, p.36).

Instead of candidates emerging from party congresses, conventions or primaries, it was generally alleged that the process of political elite recruitment in Nigeria was monetized; such that candidates were imposed by godfathers for personal gains and profit motives. The point being made here is that this occurrence took place in virtually all the various states in Nigeria but was highly prevalent in some states like Adamawa, Anambra, Benue, Borno, Edo, Enugu, Lagos, Kaduna, Kwara, Osun, Oyo and Rivers States (Osumah, 2010, p.42).

An important consequence of monetized process of leadership recruitment on governance in Nigeria could be attributed to the accentuation and institutionalisation of corruption which includes the continuous greasing of palms and settlement of political godfathers, party leaders and officials. Funds meant for development projects, in some cases might have been shared among political cabals and used in settling and sustaining political godfathers. Consequently, this dastardly act which came in different forms and methods could be the main reason why Nigeria, for a long time, has remained under-developed (Nwagboso & Duke, 2013, p.134).

The absence of intra-party competition, the preponderance of god fatherism and other manipulations could be responsible for political elite recruitment flaws in Nigeria. This anomaly has violated the rights of Nigerians to vie for political elite positions. This undemocratic attitude could be responsible for the fostering of wrong and unpopular class of leadership on the people (Olasunkami, 2010). Apart from the absence of intraparty competition and political inclusion, the political parties in Nigeria lacked healthy inter-party competitions and relations, among others.

The perceived failure of the political parties in Nigeria, particularly in their function of political elite recruitment, could be responsible for the prevalence of violence, thuggery and

rigging of elections. The inability of the political parties to live up to expectation could be attributed to the reason why they resort to dubious and fraudulent means of winning elections. This could therefore be the main reason responsible for electoral crises among political parties in Nigeria, thereby leading to electoral malpractices and nullification of election results (Dode 2010, p.191). This view was also supported by Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2015, p.133) who opined that the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 elections were massively rigged and when some of the results were appropriately challenged legally and scientifically, they were cancelled and new elections were held as a result.

Generally speaking, elections had not been peaceful, credible and transparent in Nigeria since independence in 1960. The first civilian regime unsuccessfully operated under the Westminster or parliamentary government system from October, 1960 to January 1966, when it was disrupted by a military coup.

Arising from the 1964 general elections was a serious political violence due to some manipulations that necessitated a fresh election in 1965 in the Western Region. The fresh election resulted into a widespread violence and eventual military take-over of government in January 15, 1966 and subsequently a three-year civil war (1967-1970) (Osinachukwu & Jawan, 2015, p.142). All these problems brought the first republic to an abrupt end.

After thirteen years of military rule following the collapse of the first republic, the military brokered a transition in the country from 1976 to 1979 for the second republic. General Obasanjo handed-over power to a civilian President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 after a controversial election to usher in the second republic (Ehinabhi & Ehinmore, 2011, p.139). Eguavon, (2009, p.34) reported that, even with the civil rule in place, the controversy generated by the 1979 election continued and got to a climax following the outcome of another controversial election in 1983. This led to a coup in December 31, 1983 and General Buhari became the military Head of State. The reason advanced by the leaders of the coup was that the 1983 elections held some months earlier were said to have been massively rigged in some parts of the country and this produced a large scale violence which led to massive destruction of lives and property.

The 1993 presidential election was keenly contested and the Nigerian electorate massively turned out to vote for candidates of their choice. It was adjudged to be the freest, fairest and most credible election so far in

Nigeria. The military under President Ibrahim Babangida manipulated the election and rigged the people of their interest by annulling the election results considered as the freest and fairest in the history of Nigeria's election (Moshood, 2009, p.70). The 1999 general election was also keenly contested by three political parties; PDP, APP and AD which Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP won as a former military leader and Head of State.

Corroborating the prevalence of electoral malpractices in Nigeria, Ibrahim (2019) pointed out that the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections were massively rigged in a proportion and magnitude not witnessed before. He further opined that this included unlawful production of vital electoral documents and materials, snatching and hijacking of ballot boxes, manipulation of election outcomes, unlawful thumb printing of ballot papers, hoarding of election materials and so on. He concluded that the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections as described above were "child's play" when compared to 2015 and 2019 elections.

In the views of Ekundayo (2016, p.60) although the 2015 elections were generally assessed to be free and fair, they also witnessed some hiccups and irregularities.



All the aforementioned developments in the polity, which include electoral malpractices and other manipulations, characterised the political elite recruitment process in Nigeria. The various electoral manipulations mentioned above were masterminded by the Nigerian political elite who at various times demonstrated its ability to create, recreate and convert political institutions such as the political parties and electoral commissions to permit office longevity and perpetuate special interests. The Nigerian political elite would deploy political authority to structure convenient choices that include the banishment, weakening or manipulation of democratic political institutions charged with oversight roles. Thus, the process of political elite recruitment has been fraught with manipulations by the political elite, just as the political elite theory postulates that the political elite will devise a variety of methods for maintaining themselves perpetually in power through perpetuation of regimes, elite circulation or re-cycling of leaders and other means such as oligarchy, power brokers, god fathers or political mafia. These are some of the criticisms levelled against the elite theory and they underscore the cumulative ability of the political elite to act in concert and protect their interests. This ability is exceptionally enhanced by their dexterity, common appearances and interests that facilitate cohesion, esprit de corps and mass control. This is more or less a confirmation of political elite dominance in Nigeria.

Relevance of Elite Theory in the Elite Recruitment Process in Nigeria

In spite of the foregoing analysis on the weaknesses of the elite theory, it can be said to be applicable and relevant to political elite recruitment in Nigeria. The power elite are present in any society, no matter how small or large, old or new, the society is. For instance, the power elite has been identified with those occupying key positions in the economic, political and military institutions in any country. In the case of Nigeria, the economic, political and military powers are subsumed in a microscopic few and their collaborators. This class exercises overriding power in Nigeria through political, economic and military institutions. For example, such men as President Muhammadu Buhari, Olusegun Obasanjo, Goodluck Jonathan, Atiku Abubakar, Bola Amed Tinubu, Governor Nyesom Wike and their likes can be classified as political elites by the positions they have occupied or occupying currently. On the economic side are names like Aliko Dagote, Alhaji T.Y. Danjuma, Otedola, Adeleke, etc, while on the military side there are names like Major-General Abayomi Olonishakin, General T.Y. Buratai, Rear Admiral IbokEteIbas, Air Vice Marshall Sadique Abubakar, BabaganaMonguno etc. This situation is what Mosca (1939) meant when he referred to the elite as the organized minority.

The assumption of the theory that all men love power and those in power will do anything to keep it is one that completely holds true in the Nigerian society. A clear instance in support of this is the character of the Nigerian ruling elites during elections. They have proven over the years that they do not care about the means but to remain in power for as long as they can. This is one of the reasons it was difficult before 2015, for an incumbent president to lose election in Nigeria.

The elite theory as a framework has greatly helped in illuminating and throwing more light on politics and other related concepts such as elite circulation, re-cycling of leaders and regime elongation or longevity. These are popular phenomena in Nigeria. For instance, the plot by the former president of Nigeria; Olusegun Obasanjo and his associates, to run for a third term was an attempt by some section of the Nigerian ruling elites to consolidate power and remain in control of the affairs of the nation. These are indications that those in power in the Nigerian



State do not want to surrender power easily but to hold on to it tenaciously, whereas, some are also out there, struggling fiercely, to gain or hijack power at any cost.

It is established by the theory that Politics in Nigeria has been all about a relationship between two parallel groups of individuals; the rulers and the masses. One only comes to the other when there is need for them. Hence the theory divides the society into two different groups which is defined in terms of power. It is the ruling class that produces the power elite, the power wielding minority group, in any society.

The assumption of the elite theory which emphasizes inequality rather than equality in the society is real in the Nigerian society today. This inequality has constantly been deployed as a strategy of winning elections in Nigeria. The ruling elites have continually widened the gap between the rich and the poor in the country such that, the 'have nots' are extremely poor, while them (the ruling elites) are extremely rich. The report of the UN agency that described Nigeria as the world capital of poverty in 2018 is a reference in this instance. It can therefore be argued that this is a deliberate attempt to keep the poor masses perpetually under their control and to regulate the process of elite circulation. It is however not very true that the elites are the highest accomplishers in their fields and that the political elite are imbued with personal resources such as social skills, intelligence and special interest in politics. In Nigeria, some members of the elites have made a career in politics and nothing outside of it. Many Nigerian top politicians lack social skills necessary for governance and are only accomplished in politics.

Finally, election rigging and other electoral malpractices in Nigeria is a mere confirmation of an assumption of the elite theory that emphasizes the rule by the minority over the majority in any society. The Nigerian society is virtually ruled by the political elite, a minority group of achievers in politics who are highly organized, cohesive and will do everything to secure, conserve, preserve and perpetuate its power over a majority that is largely unorganized. In summation, the elite theory as proposed by the earlier mentioned scholars explains the reasons why the history as well as the process of political elite recruitment in Nigeria has been one of a fierce struggle among politicians and political power seekers, usually characterized by godfatherism, militarism, thuggery, rigging, ethnicity, corrupt practices and delayed judgments from election petition tribunals and even the law courts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the aid of the elite theory it is much easier and better to understand and appreciate the concept, structure and exercise of power in Nigeria and such other concepts as oligarchy, elite circulation, re-cycling of leaders, power brokers, mafia etc. and their meanings, particularly in the Nigerian context. Thus, the elite theory as a framework has helped in illuminating and throwing more light on the process of political elite recruitment in Nigeria. The theory has been criticized to be antidemocratic as it views democracy as a fraud and a utopian ideal as it does not depend upon the majority but rather on the minority of the citizenship to ensure elite recruitment or transformation. It is not based on free and fair election. Rather, it relies upon the virtue of self-appointed political elite for perpetuating or maintaining power. No wonder, elections in Nigeria have not been free and fair. The fact that elections are not only violently disputed but openly rigged and officially recognized by the Nigerian governments shows the significant impact of force, fraud and authority in reproducing irresponsible leaders, regime perpetuation or longevity, re-cycling of leaders and elite circulation in Nigeria.

Through the theory, it is crystal clear that those in power do not want to surrender power easily but to hold on to it tenaciously, whereas, some are also out there, struggling fiercely, to



gain or hijack power. The resultant effects are; god fatherism, militarism, political violence, corrupt practices, rigging, other electoral malpractices, perpetuation of regimes, elite circulation and recycling of leaders etc. Thus, the political elite theory as a theoretical framework has been succinctly used in analyzing the political elite and in explaining the process of political elite recruitment in Nigeria. In a nutshell, the elite theory is very apt, applicable and relevant to political elite recruitment in Nigeria as a framework for analysis.

Following some of the abnormal practices observed and exposed by this study, the paper advances the following recommendations:

- (1) The elite recruitment process should be made open by opening the political space for quality competition that will involve those from the none-elite class. This will enable a system that will ensure fair and quality representation.
- (2) The ruling elite should be made to know that they can rule only because there are people who agree to be ruled, hence they should see leadership as service to humanity and not an opportunity to perpetrate their self-interest and initiating anti-people policies as we see some times in the country.
- (3) Political offices at all levels should be made less attractive by a great cut on the pay of occupants of such offices. This we believe will reduce the level of bickering and acrimony over political positions in Nigeria.
- (4) Elections and the entire recruitment process in Nigeria has been so exorbitant and expensive that average Nigerians find it difficult to get involved by way of contesting positions. It is therefore in our view that the process should be demonetized. This will enable common but qualified Nigerians partake in the competition and fortunately win.
- (5) Finally, the elite theory does not favor an acclaimed democratic system like Nigeria. If a system is democratic, it should be about the majority and not about an organized few or minority. Therefore, the system should be allowed to run on democratic principles and not excessively elitist.

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