

Elite Class, Corruption and Development in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Fourth Republic (1999-2021)

By

Eghweree, Ogheneruonah Charles, PhD
Senior Lecturer

Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Nigeria
Email: reeoas@uniben.edu

&

Emeyese, Akpodiogaga Sunday
Doctoral Student

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Benin, Nigeria
Email: emeyese247@gmail.com

Abstract

The post-independence history of Nigeria has been dominated by failed attempts at socio-economic and political development. The elite class has largely been responsible for this failure being at the helms of government affairs and having presided over public policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. This paper scrutinizes the elite class in Nigeria and its position in the development conundrum in the context of pervasive corruption. Deploying secondary sources of evidence, within historical-comparative research methodology, it was discovered that elitist greed and a generally corrupt governance milieu has been the bane of development in Africa's most populous state. It suggested that if the nation is to exit the current crises, then it should embrace the developmental state paradigm, recruiting a political leadership that is developmental-oriented while also restructuring the entire governance architecture to ensure fairness which will reduce both underclass discontent and ethnic nationalities agitations.

Keywords: Elite, Class, Corruption, Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

The post-independence political and socio-economic history of Nigeria has been fraught with the problem of corruption. Successive administration, military and civilian alike, have tried to clampdown on this negative phenomenon with little success. It has been argued by Osaghae (2002) that the disjuncture between the state and society in Nigeria's Fourth Republic democracy is partly responsible for the endemic nature of corruption. Corruption has frustrated the quest for development and has led to the pauperization of the underclass with the nation struggling in the comity of nations to get the fame that matches its potential. Yet the nation remains strong only in terms of this potentiality. Indeed, the stunted developmental and growth process of the nation belies its natural resource endowment and it amounts to an indictment on the political class since independence. Political leadership in Nigeria seems to have failed as the needed development has

refused to birth. All of these at present have led to the increase in crime and criminality everywhere in the country.

Indeed, political leadership in Nigeria has largely failed in the developmental promise that it periodically serves the masses of the nation. Political leadership as led by the elite class in Nigeria has been part and parcel of the crises of (under)development in the nation (TI, 2021). Meanwhile in other climes there is a steady trend of emergence of development-oriented leaders who are emancipating their peoples from poverty and pushing for sustainable development. There are a number of states in not only Europe and North America, but also in Asia and Latin America where there are conscientious leaderships with the political will to pull their people out of poverty. In Asia, the rise of developmental states with altruistic elite class has led to the emergences of some Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) that are often referred to as Asian Tigers (Woo-Cummings, 1999; Meyns and Musamba, 2010). In Europe and North America, liberal democracy has continued the tradition of deploying good governance driven by the upper class to consistently pursue development, and in South America there has recently been the trend of clamping down on poverty via the reduction of inequality (OXFAM, 2019).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the narrative has been different. Elitist greed and the avarice of their cronies have often colluded to ensure that the needed socio-economic and political development remain elusive. In most countries in the region, there has been a futile attempt at enthroning a leadership that is developmental driven. In the particular situation of the Nigerian state, elitist corruption and the continuous mismanagement of resources has been a key factor militating against socio-economic development. According to Joseph (1996) prebendalism, which entails the abuse of official positions by the ruling elite, has been a culture among the elite class in Nigeria. These elites fleece the public treasury in different ways. Contract inflation, over-invoicing, kick-backs, bribery, manipulation of official asset-declaration evidence, deployment of proxy accounts are some of the ways through which these amoral elites swindle the state while the agenda for socio-economic development continue to stagnate. This situation has not helped the quest for development in much of the post-independence era.

Meanwhile, these elites have not been able to strategically deploy resources on behalf of the society. In the main they have been inept in the deployment and application of available resources. The endgame for them in politics is to appropriate these resources for themselves and their cronies leaving in their trail a huge burden of poverty within the society. In the north the almajiri syndrome which is buoyed by poverty has now led to increase in insecurity as bandits are mainly recruited from the ranks of the almajiri as they grow old (Sobowale, 2019). The Boko Haram challenge can also be linked, at least in part, to crippling poverty as the availability of a huge army of poor people makes it possible for those who intend to pervert religious ideologies to have their way. One of the greatest disservice that bad leadership and corruption does to a country is the exacerbation of poverty which inevitably push people to the precipice and ultimately to crimes and criminality.

In the south, this state pervasion and elitist corruption has manifested in different negative vices. Economic kidnapping for ransom and political assassination are some of the negative tendencies that have been birthed by poverty occasioned by elite state pervasion. There

has also been an increase in fraudulent activities especially as it relates to internet fraud by an increasingly desperate youth bulge eager to escape the poverty trap. These activities have rendered the security of humans, finance and other resources precarious. Entrenched poverty and inequality driven on the axle of prebendalism and elitist state pervasion have thus encouraged underdevelopment which has made Nigeria a laughing stock in the comity of nations. The character of the state and the nature of state-society relations are important in this analysis. When the state and its institutions are weak it may be opened to capture by an amoral elite class. In this respect, the character of the state becomes crucial.

Following Weber's adaptive view of the modern state (Anter, 2014), the nature and character of leaders shape the nature and character of the state. In situations where the elites are conscientious and equipped with political morality, there is bound to be an emergence of institutions that are developmental driven in terms of socio-economic and political framework. The warped character of the political elites in Nigeria is thus one of the causes of state dysfunction in much of the post-independence history of Africa's biggest democracy. Dishonest public officials often capture state institutions, strip them of their autonomy and proceed to appropriate resources without let or hindrance. As Ake (1985:4) argued long ago 'in the absence of *'autotomizing'* mechanisms in the post-colonial state, the resources of physical coercion become the tools of particular groups, especially the hegemonic factions of the ruling class'. Indeed, this has been one of the most telling aspects of the weak nature of the Nigeria state.

Nigeria thus continues to perform poorly in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI). In the 2020 survey, Nigeria ranked a miserable 149th position out of 180 countries (TI, 2021). It is against the backdrop of this scenario that this paper scrutinizes Nigeria's elite class and their proclivity for corruption with its negative effects on socio-economic advancement of the nation. At the outset we consider some relevant conceptual themes to ensure we have a deeper understanding of these terms, thereafter we explore the literature and existential discourses on corruption in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper exits with a concluding segment and a pathway to ameliorating the situation as it concerns development.

Conceptual Discourse

Elite Class

In literary terms, elite can be seen as an individual with enviable character and traits that endear him or her to the people. They are often seen as either individuals or groups with unique character traits that single them out. This could be their level of education, economic capacity, degree of exposure or things they possess that stand them out. In some cases, they are often seen as the 'intelligentsia or societal people that dominate the public sphere. Elites are marked by class consciousness. That explains why we have elite groups in several strata of the society such as the economic, political and social realm. What stands them out is the consciousness that they belong to the group and operate purely group interest and usually dominate the larger societal affairs in pursuance of group interest. As Menges(1968:1) notes,

"There are endless assertions about the political dominance of the "rich," the "landlord class," the "economic oligarchy" and for the Latin American countries;

there is a mass of polemical prose about the various kinds of exploitive alliances the wealthy have contracted..."

This reinforces the original intent of elite groups, which is dominance for group interest, reminiscent of the primordial posture of the emergent elite class in post-colonial Africa that only seek purely sectional ethno-religious interest at the expense of the civic interest that the state represents. In political science, 'elite theory' has been developed as a theoretical framework to explain the peculiar and dynamic character of the elite class as group with inexplicable *class consciousness* and manifest quest to *dominate*. This is because, man as a socio-political being, tends to dominate especially in the realm of decision making. Constituting the minority but powerful and influential members of the society, the elite in any society, "occupy powerful positions ... with greater access to resources" (Ikelegbe, 2005). While some elites occupy strategic positions, others who do not but act behind the scenes to shape and tilt actions and decisions of the occupants of privileged positions in their favour. In the same vein, the choice of which policy to pursue or not, comes largely from the elite group whose interest, they protect with their vantage positions and social ranking. What comes to mind as far as analysis of elite theory is concerned, is simply the fact that it helps deepen societal understanding of the dynamics of social and political life of any developed or developing society.

The elite as against the masses is that collective of people, usually in the minority, who hold political power within a state, and this power include the power to make decisions that are binding on the whole society. According to Vergara (2013:31) 'an élite is a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that controls alarge amount of power'. It is thus clear that the elites are few in comparison to the mass of the people. The elites are constantly searching for avenues of differentiation, pulling themselves apart from the mass of society. For Higley(2008:3) "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". This shows that elites usually have the reach and necessary information required to influence political outcomes. They therefore struggle to maintain the status quo deploying enlightened self-interest to ensure that the political system is stable.

Political elites are a group of people, corporations, political parties and/or any other kind of body that manage and organize government and all the manifestations of political power (Vergara, 2013). Sociological perspectives, especially from the point of view of Max Weber, have explained elitist character and behaviour as they relate to political power. Weber (1958) argues that political power is an aggregate and a function of education, socio-economic status and lineage. The elites strive to maintain their control over public policy as they often form a consensus, however obscure, to ensure that their stranglehold on political power is maintained. Indeed, as sociologists like Vilfredo Pareto grappled with questions such as 'who governs?', the world steadily started to notice that there is a small group of people in every state that have the power, reach and influence to direct the trajectory of public policy. The objective therefore was to build, for the common good, ruling elite that is not only moral and conscientious, but one that is also developmental-driven. In this paper, elites are individuals with vantage position in the Nigerian state to shape her economic, political and developmental processes.

Corruption

As a concept, corruption is a universal phenomenon but has outlook and manifestation that is often peculiar and in differing dimension from one society to another local manifestation. This is because globally, dishonest behaviour acts or inactively done solely to gain private favour at the expense of public interest can be seen manifest albeit, uniquely. It's therefore safe to say that corruption manifests in different ways and in different sectors in any society. That again, explains why corruption has been defined in several ways and qualified with differing adjectives. The act itself, has come to be loosely related to breach of trust or abuse of vantage position to garner either 'economic', 'political', 'financial', 'administrative', 'bureaucratic' 'moral or ethical' favours/gains. To this end, some see corruption as abuse of moral principles to gain narrowly defined objectives to the detriment of mutually benefiting general goals. Whether petty or grand corruption, it has come to represent deliberate subversion of rule in pursuit of personal gains, ActionAid (2015). To this end, we can say that corruption refers to as dishonest and illegal activity by those in authority or power, (Idoko et al, 2015). It entails 'the violation of established rules and regulation for personal gain and profit' and can also be seen as 'willful misrepresentation of facts and figures with the intent to illegally appropriate for selfish gain'.

Corruption has been variously conceptualized as it has been a problem for many developing economies with the discourse on underdevelopment, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, often making reference to the negativity brought on by pervasive corruption both in the public and private spheres. Nye (1967) sees corruption as that behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding pecuniary or status gains. Thus when office holders deploy their position to feather their own nest, they are engaging in corruption. The global development body, World Bank (1997) conceptualized corruption as the abuse of public office for private gains through rent-seeking activities and it usually manifests in officials accepting, soliciting or extorting bribe. This perspective echoes Joseph Nye's position. Myint (2000:35) adopts a similar view when he argues that corruption entails "the use of public office or the use of official position, rank or status by an office bearer for his own personal benefit". All of these positions see the pervasive deployment of official positions for private use as corruption.

Sen (1999) provides a broader view of the concept, explaining that corruption is the violation of established rules for individual gain and profit. This notion transcends the public domain to argue that corruption normally occur in all facets of the society. Indeed, corruption may become endemic in a particular society if the subsisting culture tolerates it. When the behaviors of the critical actors within the society implicitly condone this scourge the existing institutions of state may find it difficult to clampdown on it. When the majority of people in a society are too materialistic, they may pursue wealth in a dubious manner which will inevitably lead them to engage in corrupt practices. It is in the light of this broad notion of corruption that Kaufmann (2005:82) rightly submitted that the belief that corruption is limited to "abuse of public office for private ends" is anachronistic. Corruption is an overarching social malaise, people operating in both public and private organizations engage in it.

Development

Development as a concept lacks conceptual clarity as scholars disagree on the exact meaning. For instance, those with economic background, conclude that development is all about improvement in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Others aligning to evolution theory, believe that development is historically constructed to capture improvement over historical epochs (e.g. Todaro and Smith 2009, and Escobar 1995:5). There are however others such as Sen (1999) who conclude that development mean freedom. We can therefore say development among other things, be viewed as a historical construction, economic progress and/or as holistic improvement. In terms of conceptualization, development seems to be problematic as it has within its pouch immeasurable factors which defy quantification. Development experts and many social scientists have variously defined the term. While some see it essentially as modernity and progress (Willis, 2005) others argue that it involves economic growth, increased welfare and human enhancement, modernization, auto-centered development, dialectical transformation and capacity building (Martinussen et al 1997). Development entails the positive deployment of state resources to improve the living conditions of the poor and vulnerable (Peet and Hartwick, 1999). It is about using statecraft to lift society above poverty, deprivation and squalor. This is especially true for developing societies where there are a lot of people without access to healthcare facilities, quality education, and other modern public sector deliverables. In this material sense, development economists like Todaro (2011) have argued that higher levels of production and output as reflected in the GDP are critical to development.

Some other writers have moved away from this fixation on economic indices to argue that development is a holistic concept which must embrace the entire gamut of man's existential reality. In the forefront of this movement for an eclectic appreciation of the concept is Amartya Sen who argued that development involves the removal of the major sources of unfreedom such as poverty, tyranny, social deprivation and intolerance (Sen, 1999). This view brings to the fore the immaterial aspects of the concept and suggests that the modern democratic state must expand the real freedom that citizens enjoy and that when they are liberated they will be better able to develop and become the best possible version of themselves. This tradition is in tandem with the Human Development Index (HDI) scenario which has often been applied by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The HDI moves beyond economic indices to insist that overall human capabilities are relevant in the development index. This, while inclusive of economic criteria, is not limited to them.

Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Analysis

The fact that the demise of the First Republic (1960-1966) was partly due to allegations of corruption leveled against the political class shows that the post-colonial history of the Nigerian state has been replete with this negative tendency. The revolutionaries who spear-headed that coup placed at the core the mismanagement of resources by political leaders. As Ademoyega (1981) reports:

“The aim of the Revolutionary Council is to establish a strong united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife. Our method of achieving this is strictly military but we have no doubt that every Nigerian will



give us maximum cooperation by assisting the regime and not disturbing the peace during the slight changes that are taking place...Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten per cent, those that seek to keep the country divided permanently ...those that have corrupted our society” (Ademoyega, 1981:123-125).

Subsequent military regimes had often been obsessed with curtailing corruption as it was often seen that the civilian content of governance (even during military interregnum for example permanent secretaries in ministries and heads of Departments and Agencies) were to be held responsible for this anomaly.

On 31 December, 1983 the Military intervened to truncate the President Shehu Shagari’s civilian dispensation, thus bringing an abrupt end to the Second Republic. Again, the Military pointed to wide spread corruption by the political class which it accused of sleaze and the huge mismanagement of state resources (Osaghae, 2002). This corrective intervention from the ‘puritanical’ nationalist military was to ensure that the nation is redeemed from the dangerous slide into chaos as politicians had mismanaged citizen’s trust as they could not conduct free and fair elections as witnessed in post-election violence in some places. Ironically, the military that claimed to be above board in the context of morality in governance has often been accused of corruption. The military has been involved in some of the high profile corruption scandals in the post-colonial history of the Nigerian state (Olukoshi, 1996; Osaghae, 2002). One such scandal involves the multi-billion dollars Gulf war wind-fall which was appropriated by the military under Gen.Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1991.

There were a number of public sector malfeasances during the military era many dating back to the years immediately following independence. As Campbell (1981) reports there were a lot of corruption allegations levied against the military under Gen Yakubu Gowon. Indeed, the period saw Nigeria establishing itself as a core oil exporter following the Yom Kippur war, which made Nigeria to make in-roads into areas in the global economy previously occupied by some middle-east states. The huge resources that became available to the federal government were apparently not well utilized as leadership crises made it quite impossible for the nation to effectively make use of the opportunity that was before it. During the regime of Murtala Mohammed there was the so-called ‘cement Armada’ scandal (Afolabi, 1993). All of this detracts from the apparent altruistic periodic interventions often embarked on by the military. However, corruption in the context of military regimes reached its apotheosis during the Gen Babangida’s regime, which has already received some level of attention.

There is some form of consensus among writers on the Nigerian state that the Babangida regime elevated corruption to a new level (Gboyega, 1996; Osaghae, 2002). “Not only that the regime encouraged corruption by granting pardon to convicted corrupt officials by returning theirseized properties, the regime officially sanctioned corruption in the country and made it difficult to apply the only potent measures, long prison terms and seizure of ill-gotten wealth in the future fight against corruption (Gboyega, 1996:5). The regime started the tradition of borrowing from western creditors to finance domestic development and economic growth. With the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) it became important that the nation

abide to the terms and conditions as prescribed by liberal institutions as driven by the Washington Consensus. Yet while the ordinary Nigerian was encouraged to embrace austerity measures, the ruling regime was immersed in corruption as shown by the Pius Okigbo Report (Osaghae, 2002). The long-run effect of this was stunted socio-political and economic development.

The Abacha regime seemed to have embraced official corruption as a state policy. If the Babangida regime was corrupt, then the Abacha dispensation was worse in this area. The deepening of the malaise was basically a continuation of the culture of military impunity which became a norm during the Babangida years (Nzeribe, 2017). Gen Abacha's persona as a kleptocrat has become indelible in the discourse on corruption in Africa's most populous state. Billions of dollars and other foreign currencies have been returned to Nigeria long after the death of one of Africa's biggest despots (Enweremadu, 2013). Over twenty years since the demise of the Leviathan more looted resources are still being discovered in different parts of the world as proceeds of his loot. The Abdulsami Abubakar's regime assumed leadership of Nigeria following the sudden death of General Sani Abacha. However, there is not much in the literature about the nature and extent of corruption during the period, perhaps due to the fact that the regime handed over power immediately.

In the context of civilian dispensation and democratic milieu the nation has not fared any better as politicians have often mismanaged state resources. Since the early years following independence, there have been allegations of corruption leveled against politicians. The eminent Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of the defunct Western Region, was investigated and found guilty of corruption (Nzeribe, 2017). He was found guilty by the Coker Commission (1962) which made an inquiry into the affairs of regional marketing boards. Sklar (2004:185) also reports that foremost statesman NnamdiAzikiwe was investigated by the Forster-Sutton Tribunal of Inquiry (1956) and found guilty of conflict of interest as he refused to resign from his position in the African Continental Bank (ACB) upon assuming the position of president. It was discovered that he subsequently deployed his position to influence decisions in favour of the Bank. The indictment of these personalities who are often regarded as major torch bearers of the Nigerian enlightenment is a reflection of the corrupt character of the Nigerian elite. This character has often reflected in the character of the Nigerian state itself.

In the Second Republic there were a number of allegations of corruption leveled against the elites especially the hegemonic segment of the ruling elites. As a consequence, several governors and ministers were sentenced to different jail terms by the military upon their take over in 1983. Some of the high profile corruption cases include the rice scandal involving UmaruDikko who is said to have mismanaged four billion naira meant for the importation of rice and the chairman of the ruling party chief AdisaAkinloye who allegedly spent huge sums of money on ostentatious lifestyle (Nzeribe, 2017). Elitist sleaze and corruption have been carried over into the current Fourth Republic. During the Obasanjo years, critics have argued that there is a 16 billion dollar meant for electricity infrastructure that the administration could not account for; the Dasuki \$2.1 billion arms scandal epitomizes corruption in the context of Jonathan's administration while in the current Buhari's presidency the 15 billion naira (in different currencies) found in a private residence belonging to Ayo Oke of the Nigeria Intelligence

Agency (NIA) and the Babachir Lawal ‘grass cutting’ scandals reflects elitist misdemeanor. These are only a few of the deluge of scandals involving Nigeria’s ruling elites and their proclivity for corruption.

Corruption in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: Causes and Feasible Solutions

Development experts on the Nigerian state and social scientists in general have made attempts at scrutinizing the causes, effects and the probable solutions to the danger that corruption has been to the nation in the post-colonial era. Their conclusions alongside recommendations are worth exploring in the context of the Fourth Republic. A careful examination of the discourses on corruption in Nigeria brings into clear relief three positions as it concerns the causes of corruption. The first has to do with institutional failures. This dimension considers the nature of Nigeria’s critical governance infrastructures and concludes that they are not sufficiently insulated from the overbearing influence of the ruling class. When institutions are not autonomous they can become the plaything of transient political office holders. The second position is that cultural and behavioural dimensions of individuals and groups within the state are a major contributor to the current situation. The behaviour of the major actors in an administration is a critical determinant of the degree of morality that such society enjoys. Nigerians seem to have embraced the culture of impunity and corruption in official circles. A third theme has to do with the combination of cultural/ behavioural tendency on the one hand and institutional frailties on the other. This third view is an attempt at engaging a holistic view in the quest to solving the corruption conundrum.

A number of writers have indicated that institutional frailties are responsible for pervasive corruption in Nigeria (Shuaib, 2015). The departments, agencies and parastatals saddled with governance are not effective. It is in this context that we can talk about the Nigerian state as literally soft or weak. The critical institutions that ought to be at the forefront of ensuring that governance mechanisms work properly are simply not well calibrated for the task they are supposed to perform. For example, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has often been the ‘*plaything*’ of politicians as they may deploy it to witch hunts perceived political opponents. Former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, was accused of deploying the Commission as a tool to witch hunt his political opponents (Ugoani, 2016). When political elites are able to manipulate institutions to suit their whims and caprices they will inevitably deploy such institutions for private ends.

It is in this context that Ugoani (2016) concluded, in a study concerning political will and anti-corruption management in Nigeria, that most institutions are not well insulated from the parasitic disposition of the ruling elites. In fact, elitist capture of these institutions means that they are often unable to perform their constitutional responsibilities. And as Ake (1985:4) rightly argued, ‘in the absence of autonomizing mechanisms in the post-colonial state, the resources of *the state* become the tools of particular groups, especially the hegemonic factions of the ruling class’. This truly captures the current state of institutions in Nigeria where it has been very difficult for these institutions to carry out their responsibilities and duties without let or hindrance. Interference often comes in the form of influential politicians manipulating them to achieve private purposes. Only effective sanctions and political transparency can mitigate this

circumstance. According to this notion if the nation is able to strengthen institutions such that they are able to operate without bias then corruption will reduce in the public space (Shuaib, 2015).

The second dimension relates to cultural and behavioural traits of the critical stakeholders in the Nigerian state. These include the character of the ruling elites as well as those of the masses and this perspective owe a lot to the writings of Ekeh (1975) who deployed a sociological explanation to account for the character of the political class in Nigeria. In his now famous 'two public theory' he suggests that it is easy for the political class to be abidingly moral when they are operating from their tribal bases but become amoral in the context of civic, formal or official duty. Hoffman and Patel (2017) align with this position when arguing that social norms and behaviours accounts for the critical nature of corruption in Nigeria. In Nigeria the average citizen sees government business as 'no man's business' and may refuse to cooperate with state institutions. For example, people are often not willing to volunteer information to security agencies, even if such information is a critical missing link in a crime scenario.

A research conducted by a United Nations agency has also found that the behaviour of individuals and groups within the state has contributed to the culture of corruption in Nigeria (UNODC, 2017). There is thus an entrenched culture of corruption in Nigeria due to the behaviour of individuals and officials whose attitude both feed and exacerbate the problem. Agba et al (2013) also emphasize this notion when they argued that the behaviour of public servants and politicians contribute to frustrate the attempts at reducing corruption in the public sphere. Furthermore, Ani et al (2014) submits that individuals working within institutions are often able to influence the structures of these institutions more than the institutions can influence them. This is not to deny the fact that institutions do not influence individuals but to emphasize the fact that individuals control over these structures has far reaching implications for public policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. It is thus suggested that value re-orientation to change the disposition of citizens towards the state is a veritable means of clapping down on corruption in Nigeria.

A third agenda is the combination of both cultural/behavioural dimension and institutional weaknesses as the core drivers of corruption in Nigeria. A number of scholars and development writers on Nigeria have adopted this scheme. Okolo and Akpokighe (2014) suggest that warped cultural values and a distorted legal system combine to frustrate the fight against graft in Nigeria. Otor and Eiya (2013) embraces similar notion when arguing that institutional inefficiency and public amorality are what continue to fuel elite corruption as those who are recruited into the political class have certain behavioural tendencies that encourage corruption. Indeed, social norms alongside institutional crises account for some of the problems that have resulted in a corrupt political class which has not been able to successfully pursue development on behalf of the nation's teeming population (Ogungbamila, 2014; Nwaodu et al, 2014). This position is founded on the fact that individuals influence institutions, and the institutions in turn influence individuals. To handle the challenge presented by elitist corruption will thus mean that there should be behavioural as well as institutional changes within governance and societal structures (Otor and Eiya, 2013; Nwaodu et al, 2014).

Elitism, Corruption and Development: The situation in Nigeria.

Development is vital for any state because it guarantees growth and state survival. This explains why states strive to provide qualitative life to their citizenry. Nigeria has development challenges despite abundant human, material and natural resources in her possession, (Eghweree, 2016; Tolu and Abe, 2011). Renowned as an African giant, and the largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has made little progress alleviating poverty irrespective of the enormous resource wealth and the various developmental initiatives. According to Bitrus (2013:53), “*the Nigerian rate of development right from independence in 1960 has been a dwindling one*”. This has been linked to elite induced corruption that cripples governance and undermines developmental efforts.

Politically exposed individuals, abuse both position and authority to enrich selves, fail deliberately to govern effectively and steal too much to leave enough for developmental purposes. With illicit funds to spend, politics becomes a calling where such illicit finds are ‘*invested*’ with the hope of tilting the political process to their advantage. This results in violent prone electoral process to enthrone a government that undermines the development process.

As corruption grows, it becomes possible for ‘*good money*’ to find its way into wrong hands. When this is the case, state institutions are arguably compromised by elites as individuals powerful enough to undermine established rules and frustrate development eventually takes over governance. That births ignoble culture of impunity where people or groups, can afford to disregard laid down rules regarding governance and development by extension. This depicts the meeting point between corruption, elite dominance, governance and development. In the absence of corruption elite class, governance would be purposeful and fruitful while development would be sure as is social services. When reverse is the case with corruption on the drivers’ seat, governance suffers and development is scuttled on the altar of primitive accumulation by corrupt elites and individuals saddled with the duty of piloting public affairs. Various studies different but related, established a negative link between elite induced corruption, governance and development (Idoko et al, 2016, Page, 2018, Toakodi & Assi, 2016, Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2012). The general situation in Nigeria captures the ignoble nexus between elite induced corruption, poor governance and precarious development situation.

Theoretical Framework

In sub Saharan Africa several countries have failed in the quest to raise the standard of living of their people. In a nutshell, they have fallen short of expectation in the area of national development. While different factors can be adduced as reasons behind this failure, there is a consensus among development experts that political leadership, as represented by African elites, is the biggest culprit (Osaghae, 2002; Aigbokhan, 2017; Murray-Evans, 2018). Indeed, the post-independence history of the region is replete with tales of missed opportunities and stymied growth. In the specific context of Nigeria, political elites have not been able to turn the potentiality inherent in Africa’s most populous state into reality. Thus despite the availability, in abundance, of natural resources the nation ranks very low in most development indices. Pervasive corruption by amoral political elite has often meant the country is unable to compete favourably with other nations (TI, 2021). It is in the light of these conditions that this paper

deploys the developmental state theory to properly situate development initiative in Nigeria as a major theme in this discourse revolves around development-oriented leadership.

Theory of the Developmental State

The agenda concerning a discourse on the developmental state theory was first initiated by Chalmers Johnson. The theory arrived in the context of the great socio-economic developmental strides of post-war Japan (Johnson, 1982). He situates Japan's adoption of the developmental state concept in two circumstances. Firstly, as a late developer and, secondly, in the context of East Asian revolutionary nationalism. "The very idea of the developmental state originated in the situational nationalism of the late industrializers and the goals of the developmental state were invariably derived from comparisons with external reference economies" (Johnson 1982: 24). Japan had to recover from the devastation it suffered during the Second World War. In any case, it required huge rebuilding as it was not a sophisticated economy yet. The emergence of conscientious political elites was critical to this ambition. Subsequently, other development theorists built on Chalmers Johnson's theoretical efforts. Peter Evans deployed the concept of embedded autonomy to argue that the developmental state institutions must necessarily cooperate with critical stakeholders within the state but must also be autonomous enough to prevent state-capture by individuals (Evans, 1995).

Adrian Leftwich brings a political tone to the discourse as he argues that 'development is inescapably political' (Leftwich, 2000: 4). This position sees the developmental state as having a political leadership that has the desire and will to pursue development on behalf of the people. Ha Joon Chang emphasized Institutional Political Economy (IPE) and argued that developing countries should resist the temptation of having blind faith in neo-liberal free market (Chang, 2003). In his *'Kicking Away the Ladder'*, he argued elegantly and with much admirable eloquence, appealing to the elites in developing formations to deploy protectionism to save infant industries. He showed that current global powers did not use the so-called Washington consensus prescriptions when they were developing. Linda Weiss' intervention has to do with the survival of the developmental state with crippling globalization eroding some of the powers of the territorial state. Weiss (2000) attempts to provide answer to the question: Is globalization gradually making the developmental state irrelevant? Weiss (2000) argues that state power has not waned in the wake of globalization and that the developmental state will react to this new reality by changing its behaviour.

Following these theoretical contributions, a number of classical defining characteristics of the archetypal developmental state have been distilled and have become canons in the discourse concerning the developmental state. The first, and perhaps the most important, is a development-oriented political leadership. This is especially true for the Nigerian state where corrupt politicians do not care about the welfare of citizens. There is a consensus among developmental state theorists of the necessity of a development-oriented leadership (Beeson, 2003; WoodCumings, 1999). In the context of East Asian economic growth, political leaders were able to develop functional institutions required for effective deployment of resources. The second is an autonomous and efficient bureaucracy.

In contradistinction to other developing regions and areas, the developmental states of East Asia were able to create development institutions that were competent in driving development (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995). Thirdly, is the development of a private sector that is production-driven. The developmental state has a private sector with the requisite organizational and technical competence to support the manufacturing, industrial and services sectors. Finally, the governance milieu must deliberately focus on the task of development. As Chang (2006:1) submits in the context of East Asian states "...the achievements of the region's economies did not stop at income growth. Their records in terms of improvements in infant mortality, life expectancy, educational achievements and other indicators of 'human development' have also been very impressive, even considering their income growth". When citizens discover that the entire governance framework is geared towards socio-economic and political progress they will be ready to support the state (Meyns and Musamba, 2010).

A Nigerian Developmental State

The Nigerian state, in much of its post-colonial history, has not fared well. The nation has often deployed different development strategies in the hope that the existential living conditions of citizens are ameliorated. From state-propelled national development plans in the years immediately following independence, through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in the 1980s and 1990s, to the various economic reforms that have been undertaken in the present Fourth Republic, political elites in Nigeria have not been able to positively use public policies to achieve economic development. The Washington Consensus paradigm which the nation has often adopted since the 1980s has led to the financialization of the economy placing premium on intangibles with little emphasis on productivity (Ezema and Ogujiuba, 2012). The revenue earned from crude oil is often monetized and spent on recurrent expenditure with the left over probably collected by the ruling class as rents and proceeds of corruption. The implication of this on the productive basis of the state is dire as nation continues to struggle with a weak productive base.

This '*financialization*' of the economy and its reliance on the external context has often had to contend with the fluctuation of the dollar in the world market, with current global economy dependent on the US dollar as the basic exchange unit. All this coupled with external borrowings over the years has cemented the nation's place as a peripheral enclave that is reliant on western creditors and other external financial centres for its growth and developmental trajectory. The overall implication is that the nation's real productive base is stunted. Again, elitist reliance on a mono-cultural economy, as seen in the continuous emphasis on crude oil export, is not helping the supposed giant of Africa. Diversification of the economy has basically remained a cliché and political rhetoric peddled by an amoral political leadership in much of the post-independence history of the nation. Furthermore, the continuous reliance on the external environment for the refining of crude oil has often led to the crisis of extraversion, since fluctuation in the prices of petrol in the global market has a negative implication for the domestic economy (Osaghae, 2002; Aigbokhan, 2017). Indeed, corrupt elites continue to maintain this framework as they deploy current subsidy regime to fleece the nation's resources.

It is in this light that this article emphasizes the adoption of the developmental state paradigm in order to exit the current crises of underdevelopment plaguing Africa's most populous state. A development-oriented leadership in Africa will excuse itself of corrupt tendencies and place emphasis on sincerely pulling the vast majority of people out of poverty. Mkandawire (2001) submitted that in the context of Africa, there should be less rhetoric and more of conscientiousness in the quest to pursue development. In the specific scenario of the Nigerian state, political elites can finally bring themselves to this endeavour and develop workable state-society relations which will make the citizens eventually bring patriotism to work. This will necessarily bring about an independent and efficient bureaucracy since the recruitment process of state officials will reflect the nature of society and political leadership. Such civil service will be able to deploy resources optimally without recourse to primordial and other negative sentiments. The private sector must in this circumstance be allowed to blossom and deploy resources such that it becomes a partner to the state in the quest to reduce unemployment and poverty (Meyns and Musamba, 2010). Finally, the governance environment in Nigeria must move away from the tradition of predatory rule, in which the levers of power are deployed to feather private nests, to a more moral situation where state resource is efficiently spent. A performance-oriented governance framework will encourage citizens to see the state as essentially belonging to the people. Under such circumstance, there will be less security crises.

Conclusion

The verdict then is that Nigeria's ruling elites have in much of the post-colonial history of the nation failed in the crucial assignment of political leadership. Under their watch underdevelopment and irresponsible governance have become the hallmark of a nation that remains great only in terms of its potential. The nation performs poorly in most economic and development indicators. Indeed, poverty and economic inequality have become endemic in Nigeria that nation has become the home to the highest number of poor people in the world (UNDP, 2018; OXFAM, 2019). Similarly, in terms of out of school children, open-air defecation and insecurity the nation is not doing well. The inescapable consequences of this is that social cohesion and state-survival are now being threatened as a number of ethnic nationalities within the state are agitating for the restructuring of the state, while others are clamouring for the outright break-up of the entity called Nigeria.

All this can be traced to an inefficient political leadership as led by Nigeria's elite class, a class that has deployed patron-client network to run the state aground while engaging in corrupt practices to the detriment of the underclass. Pervasive corruption by the elites in Nigeria has constantly reflected in Transparency International's yearly survey of global Corruption Perception Index (CPI) with implication for the nation's international profile and image, which are linked to a country's prospect as a business destination and investment clime. In the end elitist greed and avarice in Nigeria is traced to a number of societal and state factors. Cultural and behavioural factors inherent within the society can be fundamental to corrupt practices in the public domain. It is common to hear Nigerians say that '*government business is no man's businesses*'. This clear abdication on the part of citizens who ought to be vigilant is a problem for governance. It is a core duty of the individual to hold those who are in position of authority

accountable. This culture has not been well-entrenched in Nigeria where the ruling elites seem to have too much leverage over state resources.

Recommendations

How can the nation escape these crises of elitist corruption and the underdevelopment problematic? Firstly, the problem of institutional inefficiency as well as their lack of autonomy must be frontally confronted. Elitist corruption has enjoyed huge support from institutions that have been stripped of their independence. If Nigeria's critical institutions are autonomous then they will be able to frustrate they political class in their bid to appropriate resources of state. Here, the laws must be strengthened to ensure that anyone who breaches the rules must be punished appropriately. Deterrence, thus, will mean that gradually the culture of morality will become firmly entrenched in the public domain. Under such circumstances it will be easy for auditors to check the excesses of political elites and their collaborators. Behavioural and cultural changes are required throughout the entire societal architecture of the Nigerian state. No longer should citizens behave as though governance issues do not concern them. Issues relating to elections and the reporting of crimes are some of the ways that citizens can support the state.

Indeed, whistle blowing is a veritable means of fighting and reducing corruption in developing societies. When these incidents are reported the culture of impunity will begin to recede. From the point of corporate governance, the deployment of smart technology can track the movement of huge financial resources that belong to the state, as has been suggested above strong sanctions should be deployed to deter any public official that is involved in such misdemeanor. The necessary political will must be aggregated by a development-oriented governance environment to bring into the fight against graft. Governments across must therefore strategize to engage moral persons with the requisite integrity so as to reduce the possibility of having corrupt people in the corridors of power. A conscientious ethical revolution led by a development-oriented leadership can birth this ideal.

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York: Oxford University Press

Brief Bio-data of the Authors:

Dr. Eghweree, Ogheneruonah Charles is a Senior Lecturer and current Head of Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Nigeria. He has research interest in International Relations, Corruption and Development Studies as well as Politics of Integration.

Emeyese, Akpodiogaga Sunday is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Nigeria. He has research interest that covers International Relations, Comparative Politics, Corruption Studies and Development.