POLITICS *NIGERIANA* AND THE SUBVERSION OF DEMOCRACY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's political trajectory has long been marred by a dissonance between imported Western democratic frameworks and indigenous political realities, resulting in a unique and often contradictory model referred to here as Politics Nigeriana. This form of politics, characterised by personalised rule, primitive accumulation, lack of patriotism, politicisation of security, rigging and thuggery, foreign-reliance, prebendalism, ethno-religious manipulation, institutional weakness, and disregard for democratic norms, presents significant challenges to national development and security. The objective of this paper is to critically examine the nature and manifestations of Politics Nigeriana, highlighting its deviation from orthodox democratic principles and its implications for Nigeria's socio-economic progress and internal security.The significance of the paper lies in its illumination of the underlying causes of Nigeria's persistent governance crises, especially in the post-1999, where democratic processes have often been hollowed out by systemic corruption, electoral malpractice, and elite dominance. Employing a qualitative research methodology grounded in secondary data, this paper draws on academic literature, policy documents, media reports, and institutional publications to examine the historical evolution and contemporary dynamics of Nigeria's political culture. The analysis is situated within a multi-theoretical framework, recognising that no single theoretical perspective adequately captures the interconnected challenges of elite dominance, institutional fragility, democratic erosion, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper is anchored primarily on PrebendalismTheory, while incorporating insights from Elite Theory and Neo-Patrimonial Theory to provide a more comprehensive analytical lens. Although Nigeria has not experienced overt political instability in the form of military coups, regime collapse, or constitutional breakdown since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the findings indicate that prevailing political practices continue to undermine democratic institutions, weaken governance processes, and constrain sustainable national development. The politicisation of security agencies, marginalisation of dissenting voices, and occasional subversion of constitutional principles undermine the rule of law and democratic accountability. These practices contribute to political tensions, electoral disputes, and periodic outbreaks of violence, while also discouraging domestic and foreign investment, critical drivers of sustainable development. Consequently, the challenge is less one of political instability in the conventional sense and more one of democratic fragility, governance deficits, and institutional weakness. Furthermore, it sustains a culture of

impunity among the political elite, impeding efforts at institutional reform and inclusive governance.The paper concludes that the abuse of democracy under the guise of PoliticsNigeriana constitutes a clear and present danger to Nigeria's aspirations for peace, progress, and national cohesion. It recommends a rethinking of Nigeria's governance model by incorporating culturally grounded, participatory approaches that prioritise accountability, transparency, and social justice.

Keywords: Democracy, National Development, Politics Nigeriana, Security, Subversion

Introduction

Globally, democracy has been widely acclaimed as the most viable system of governance, promoting accountability, participation, rule of law, and protection of human rights. However, the abuse of democratic principles, especially in emerging democracies, poses a significant threat to sustainable development and security. As witnessed in several parts of the world, when democratic institutions are weakened or manipulated, the result is often political instability, social unrest, economic stagnation, and the erosion of citizens' trust in governance. The rise of authoritarian tendencies in countries such as Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro and Turkey under RecepTayyipErdoğan illustrates how democratic backsliding endangers both national and global stability (Levitsky&Ziblatt, 2018).On the African continent, post-colonial states have struggled to entrench democratic norms in the face of military coups, ethnic politics, elite domination, and corruption. Countries like Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe and Sudan under Omar al-Bashir epitomise prolonged authoritarian rule cloaked in democratic rhetoric, leading to protracted conflict, economic collapse, and forced migration. Despite regional efforts by the African Union (AU) and sub-regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to uphold constitutional rule, as seen in ECOWAS' stance against coupists in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, democracy remains fragile in many states due to weak institutions and political manipulation (Adebajo, 2022).

West Africa as a sub-region, has been particularly volatile, with a growing trend of electoral violence, third-term agendas, suppression of dissent, and elite capture of state institutions. For example, in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, constitutional amendments were exploited to extend presidential terms, triggering widespread unrest. This pattern reflects what Diamond (2019) calls a "democratic recession," where formal institutions exist but are hollowed out by illiberal practices. The consequences include deteriorating public service delivery, youth unemployment, transnational crime, and extremism, factors that heighten insecurity across the region.Nigeria, as a key actor in West Africa, has been both a promoter and violator of democratic norms. Despite transitioning from military to civilian rule in 1999, the Nigerian state has been plagued by systemic electoral fraud, political violence, judicial compromise, and the repression of civil liberties. For instance, the 2007 and 2019 general elections were marred by voter suppression, ballot box snatching, and militarisation of the political space, casting doubt on the credibility of the electoral process (Musa, 2023). Moreover, the deployment of security forces to stifle protest,

as seen in the aftermath of the #EndSARS demonstrations, exemplifies the state's tendency to criminalise dissent and blur the lines between democracy and authoritarianism (Amnesty International, 2023). The abuse of democracy in Nigeria is intricately linked to the dominance of political godfathers, rampant corruption, and the instrumentalisation of ethnic and religious identities for political gain. Political parties function more as elite cartels than democratic institutions, with candidate selection processes often devoid of transparency and internal democracy. The cases of party imposition in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), particularly in gubernatorial elections in Rivers and Lagos States(Obinna, 2023), underscore the prevalence of anti-democratic practices. Additionally, the use of state resources to perpetuate incumbency and silence opposition not only undermines the democratic ethos but also fosters a culture of impunity.

From a geopolitical perspective, Nigeria's six zones reflect diverse realities in the practice and abuse of democracy. In the North-West and North-East zones, insurgency and banditry have significantly disrupted civic engagement and democratic participation. The Boko Haram crisis, particularly in Borno and Yobe States, has led to voter disenfranchisement, displacement, and the breakdown of political order (Omoragbon&Okhade, 2022). Meanwhile, in the South-East and South-South, allegations of marginalisation and political exclusion have fuelled secessionist agitations, while state responses have often involved repressive tactics, such as the proscription of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the militarisation of civil spaces (Hassan & Musa, 2014; Ojo, 2023).At the state level, governance is frequently compromised by executive overreach, rubber-stamp legislatures, and the absence of local government autonomy. States like Kano, where political thuggery and vote-buying are common, and Imo, where judicial rulings on elections have raised questions about legal impartiality, reflect how the subversion of democratic institutions contributes to political instability and insecurity.

In Nigeria, the excessive and often unchecked authority of some state governors, frequently likened to "emperors" due to their concentration of power and undemocratic practices, has undermined democratic accountability and stifled grassroots participation. For example, governors have been accused of manipulating local government elections to install loyalists, as observed in states such as Rivers, Kano, and Lagos, where ruling party candidates consistently secure overwhelming victories, raising concerns over electoral credibility (Inter-Party Advisory Council, IPAC, 2025; Channels Television, 2024, April 18). In many instances, governors have dissolved elected local government councils before the end of their tenure, replacing them with caretaker committees, thereby weakening constitutionally guaranteed local autonomy (Ogbonna & Ofuebe, 2021; Sunday &Chinedum, 2014). Such practices not only erode checks and balances within the state but also limit citizens' direct involvement in governance at the grassroots level.

Thus, Nigeria's political trajectory has long been marred by a dissonance between imported Western democratic frameworks and indigenous political realities, resulting in a unique and often contradictory model referred to here as Politics *Nigeriana*. This form of politics, characterised by personalised rule, primitive accumulation, lack of patriotism, politicisation of

security, rigging and thuggery, foreign-reliance, *prebendalism*, ethno-religious manipulation, institutional weakness, and disregard for democratic norms, presents significant challenges to national development and security. This paper therefore, critically examine the nature and manifestations of Politics *Nigeriana*, highlighting its divergence from orthodox democratic principles and its implications for Nigeria's socio-economic progress and internal security. The significance of the paper lies in its illumination of the underlying causes of Nigeria's persistent governance crises, especially in the post-1999 Fourth Republic era, where democratic processes have often been hollowed out by systemic corruption, electoral malpractice, and elite dominance. Employing a qualitative methodology based on secondary data sources, academic literature, policy documents, media reports, and institutional publications, the papersynthesises historical and contemporary evidence to trace the evolution of Nigeria's political culture.

Conceptualising Politics *Nigeriana*, Subversion of Democracy, Development and Security

Politics *Nigeriana* denotes a uniquely Nigerian variant of governance that, while outwardly adopting democratic frameworks, is deeply embedded in systemic distortions and elite capture. It encapsulates the deliberate manipulation of formal institutions and electoral processes by political elites to serve parochial interests, often at the detriment of public welfare. Rather than upholding democratic ideals such as participation, accountability, and transparency, Politics *Nigeriana* is typified by *prebendalism*, where public office becomes a vehicle for the redistribution of state resources to loyal followers (Joseph, 1987). As Ake (1996) observes, Nigeria's political arena is dominated by a narrow elite class that exploits state resources for personal and factional gain, sidelining the broader imperative of national development.This mode of governance is further characterised by the politicisation of state institutions, including the judiciary and security agencies, which are often subordinated to the whims of those in power, eroding constitutional authority and public trust (Musa, 2023). Ethno-regional and religious identities remain central to political mobilisation and electoral calculations. Informal zoning arrangements are employed to distribute key political positions among Nigeria's diverse groups, reinforcing identity-based loyalty at the expense of meritocracy (Suberu, 2010). Religion equally serves as a potent tool for political control, with religious leaders frequently acting as intermediaries or endorsers during elections (Jatau & Maza, 2023).

Patronage networks and godfatherism pervade the political process, where aspirants rely heavily on wealthy backers who, in return, demand access to state resources and policy influence (Albert, 2005). Electoral processes are routinely undermined by money politics, vote buying, excessive campaign financing, and the financial marginalisation of capable but under-resourced candidates (Hassan and Musa, 2014). Elections are further plagued by systemic irregularities, including vote rigging, ballot snatching, and political violence orchestrated by thugs loyal to political actors (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

The ideological foundations of political parties remain weak, with frequent defections driven more by opportunism than principle (Azubike*et al,* 2025). Despite Nigeria's federal structure, power remains heavily centralised in the presidency, particularly in matters of national security and fiscal allocation (Ejobowah, 2000). A gerontocratic pattern also persists, with youth largely excluded from leadership and often exploited for campaign mobilisation or electoral violence (Nnubia&Ajisebiyawo, 2024).Moreover, endemic corruption and selective anti-corruption enforcement continue to undermine democratic consolidation, as state accountability mechanisms remain fragile (Drapalova, 2019). Although the judiciary plays a key role in post-election disputes, it is frequently accused of political bias and compromise. However, civil society organisations and the media, especially via digital platforms, have become increasingly assertive in demanding accountability, even as the state seeks to curtail their influence (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). In sum, Politics*Nigeriana* reflects a hybrid political system in which the façade of democracy conceals entrenched authoritarian tendencies, elite dominance, and the persistent subversion of the public interest.

The subversion of democracy in this context refers to the abuse of democratic norms and processes, leading to the deterioration of key democratic principles, such as rule of law, separation of powers, and free and fair elections. As noted by Diamond (2008), democratic backsliding occurs when democratic institutions, meant to serve as checks on executive power, become tools of political control. In Nigeria, this has manifested in electoral malpractices such as vote-buying, intimidation, and violence, particularly during key elections like those of 2019 and 2023, where evidence of voter suppression and rigging led to widespread disillusionment (Oduola, 2023). Furthermore, the abuse of democracy extends to the manipulation of the judiciary, with courts often viewed as instruments for political patronage, rather than as independent bodies that protect the rights of citizens (Ogunyemi, 2014). This manipulation is further compounded by the marginalisation of opposition voices and the stifling of dissent, which undermines the very essence of democracy as a platform for inclusivity and accountability (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC, 2022).

Development, as conceptualised in both classical and contemporary thought, extends beyond economic growth to include the expansion of freedoms and opportunities for individuals. Sen (1999) defines development as the process of enhancing human capabilities, which requires creating an environment where people can enjoy freedoms that allow them to lead lives they have reason to value. In Nigeria, however, development has been stymied by systemic corruption, poor governance, and a political culture that prioritises personal enrichment over national well-being. According to the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2022), Nigeria's low ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI), 161 out of 191 countries, is a direct consequence of the pervasive dysfunction within its political institutions. Despite Nigeria's rich natural resources and youthful population, corruption and inefficiency in resource allocation have led to stunted economic growth and high levels of inequality. A key contributor to this stagnation is the way Politics *Nigeriana* distorts policies and diverts public funds into the pockets

of a few, leaving the majority of Nigerians in poverty (Odogwu, 2020). For instance, the oil sector, which should be a cornerstone of national development, has been marred by large-scale mismanagement and corruption, resulting in a failure to reinvest oil revenues into critical infrastructure such as education, healthcare, and transportation.

Security in contemporary scholarship encompasses not only state security (protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity) but also human security, which involves safeguarding individuals from threats like hunger, disease, and violence. The United Nations Development Programme (1994) underscores that human security is inextricably linked to the fulfilment of basic human rights and the provision of economic, social, and political security. In Nigeria, the relationship between governance and security is crucial, as poor governance, embodied in the practices of Politics *Nigeriana*, has exacerbated insecurity. From the insurgency in the North-East, led by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP), to banditry in the North-West and rising separatist agitations in the South-East, Nigeria's security situation has worsened in recent decades (Ikem, 2023). The politicisation of security forces, whereby political loyalty often trumps professional competence and neutrality, has further undermined efforts to curb violence. Furthermore, Politics*Nigeriana* has led to the militarisation of political processes, where security forces are deployed to suppress opposition and maintain elite power, rather than to protect citizens (Duru, 2019). As a result, the country has seen an increasing use of military tactics to deal with non-military issues, such as political protests, thereby fostering a culture of violence and impunity.

Thus, the interplay between Politics*Nigeriana*, the abuse of democracy, development stagnation, and insecurity in Nigeria reflects a complex and multidimensional challenge. Nigeria's political culture has evolved into one where democratic processes have been hijacked by elite interests, eroding the foundations of good governance. As highlighted by Diamond (2008), the failure of democracy to deliver on its promises is not just a failure of electoral systems, but also of the political culture that supports those systems. Consequently, Nigeria's path to sustainable development and security is hindered by a political environment that perpetuates inequality, violence, and institutional decay.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical analysis in this paper is situated within a multi-theoretical framework, recognising that no single theoretical perspective adequately captures the interconnected challenges of elite dominance, institutional fragility, democratic erosion, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper is anchored primarily on *Prebendalism* Theory, while incorporating insights from Elite Theory and Neo-Patrimonial Theory to provide a more comprehensive analytical lens.

Elite Theory

Elite Theory, as developed by classical and modern scholars such as Pareto (1935, 1963), Mosca (1939), Michels (1915), and later refined by Mills (1956), argues that all societies, regardless of their democratic structure, are ultimately governed by a small minority that holds disproportionate political, economic, and organisational power. Mills (1956), in particular, conceptualised this ruling minority as the "power elite," comprising political leaders, military authorities, and economic magnates who collectively shape national policy in their own interests.The central assumption of Elite Theory is that democracy is largely procedural rather than substantive, as real power remains concentrated in elite hands. This elite domination is sustained through control of institutions, manipulation of political participation, and strategic reproduction of power across generations. Pareto (1935, 1963) further argued that elite circulation is often limited and cyclical rather than genuinely democratic, while Mosca (1939) emphasised that ruling minorities always organise more effectively than the masses, thereby ensuring their dominance.

In the Nigerian context, Elite Theory is highly relevant in explaining Politics*Nigeriana*, where political elites dominate electoral processes, control party structures, and influence state institutions. For instance, the persistence of political godfatherism in states such as Rivers, Kano, and Lagos demonstrates how a small group of elite actors determines candidate selection and electoral outcomes, often overriding popular will. The 2007 general elections, widely criticised by the European Union Election Observation Mission and European Parliament (EU EOM, 2007; Attard-Montalto&Agnoletto, 2007), provide a historical example of elite manipulation of electoral institutions, while the 2023 elections, despite technological reforms such as BVAS, still reflected elite-driven irregularities including vote suppression and logistical manipulation (Yiaga Africa, 2023a,b).A major strength of Elite Theory is its ability to explain systemic inequality, institutional capture, and the persistence of undemocratic practices within formally democratic systems. It also provides a useful lens for understanding how elite interests shape national development priorities, often leading to policy distortion and weak accountability. However, its limitations include an overemphasis on elite cohesion and underestimation of popular resistance, civil society activism, and institutional reforms. In Nigeria, for example, civic mobilisation and judicial interventions have occasionally challenged elite dominance, suggesting that power is not entirely monopolised.

Prebendalism Theory

The most contextually appropriate framework for this paper is *Prebendalism* Theory, developed by Richard Joseph (1987) in his seminal work *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*. Joseph conceptualizes *prebendalism* as a political system in which public office is treated as a "prebend", a position of authority that is appropriated for personal, ethnic, or factional benefit rather than for public service. In such a system, political competition is driven primarily by access to state resources rather than ideological or policy differences.The core

assumption of *prebendalism* is that the state becomes an arena of competitive rent-seeking, where political actors seek office primarily to distribute resources to themselves and their networks. This leads to entrenched patron-client relationships, weak institutional autonomy, and chronic corruption. Joseph (1987) argues that in Nigeria, political offices are often converted into instruments of ethnic mobilisation and economic accumulation.

Empirical evidence strongly supports this framework. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022a,b) reports that over 133 million Nigerians (approximately 63% of the population) live in multidimensional poverty, reflecting the consequences of elite appropriation of state resources. Furthermore, Nigeria lost an estimated $29 billion annually due to infrastructure deficits and institutional inefficienciesdue to unstable power supply and electricity deficiencies, much of which is linked to corruption and mismanagement (Alli, 2024). These outcomes align closely with prebendal logic, where public resources are redistributed through informal elite networks rather than institutional channels.The strength of *Prebendalism* Theory lies in its high explanatory power within the Nigerian political environment, as it directly accounts for corruption, ethnic politics, weak governance, and developmental stagnation. However, its limitations include a tendency to overemphasise economic motivations while underplaying ideological, institutional, and global influences on governance. Additionally, critics argue that it may risk normalising corruption as culturally embedded rather than structurally contestable.

Neo-Patrimonial Theory

A complementary perspective is provided by Neo-Patrimonial Theory, associated with scholars such as Jean-François Médard (1982) and Bratton and van de Walle (1997). This theory explains the coexistence of formal bureaucratic institutions with informal personalised networks of power. In neo-patrimonial systems, leaders maintain authority not through institutional rules but through patronage, loyalty, and discretionary control over state resources.The central assumption of this theory is that although modern states possess constitutional and bureaucratic frameworks, these are often undermined by informal practices that personalise authority and weaken institutional autonomy. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) argue that such systems are characterised by clientelism, weak rule of law, and selective enforcement of regulations.

In Nigeria, neo-patrimonial dynamics are evident in the politicisation of security institutions, selective anti-corruption enforcement, and the dominance of executive authority over institutional checks and balances. For example, the controversial deployment of security agencies during elections, such as in Kogi State in 2019, where electoral violence and intimidation were reported, illustrates the use of state institutions for partisan purposes (Ogundipe, 2019). Similarly, perceptions of selective prosecution by agencies such as the EFCC further reinforce the neo-patrimonial character of governance.The strength of this theory lies in its ability to explain the dual reality of formal democracy and informal governance practices. However, it is sometimes criticised for being overly descriptive and less predictive, offering limited insight into pathways for institutional transformation.

Synthesis of the Integrated Theoretical Framework and Justification

Given the complexity of Nigeria's political system, characterised by the coexistence of formal democratic institutions and entrenched informal power relations, this paper adopts *Prebendalism* Theory as its principal analytical framework, while drawing on Elite Theory and Neo-Patrimonial Theory as complementary lenses. This triangulated theoretical approach provides a comprehensive and multidimensional explanation of Politics*Nigeriana*, capturing the economic logic of political behaviour, the structural dominance of ruling elites, and the informal institutional arrangements through which power is exercised and sustained. At the core of this synthesis, *Prebendalism* Theory (Joseph, 1987) offers the most context-specific explanation of Nigeria's political reality. Joseph's argument that public office is treated as a "prebend", a resource to be appropriated for personal, ethnic, or factional advantage, remains highly relevant in explaining persistent patterns of corruption, patronage, and rent-seeking. Empirical indicators strongly support this claim. For instance, Nigeria ranked 154 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2024), reflecting systemic governance weaknesses linked to the commodification of public office. Furthermore, the Alli (2024) estimates that Nigeria loses approximately $29 billion annually due to inefficiencies in governance and infrastructure deficits, much of which is associated with corruption and elite capture. These outcomes reflect prebendal logic, where state resources are distributed through personalised networks rather than institutional mechanisms.

Complementing this, Elite Theory (Pareto, 1935, 1963; Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956) provides a structural explanation of how a relatively small political class dominates decision-making processes and perpetuates inequality. Mills' concept of the "power elite" is particularly applicable in Nigeria, where political officeholders, business elites, and security chiefs often form interconnected networks of influence. Historical and contemporary evidence illustrates this dominance. For example, the persistence of political *godfatherism* in states such as Rivers, Kano, and Lagos demonstrates how elite actors determine electoral outcomes and candidate selection, often bypassing democratic competition. The 2007 general elections, widely condemned by the European Union Election Observation Mission and European Union (EU EOM, 2007; Attard-Montalto&Agnoletto, 2007), further illustrate elite manipulation of democratic institutions through electoral fraud, ballot stuffing, and institutional capture. More recently, reports from Yiaga Africa (2023a,b) on the 2023 general elections highlight continued challenges such as vote suppression and logistical manipulation, reinforcing the argument that elite interests remain central to Nigeria's democratic process. Meanwhile, Neo-Patrimonial Theory (Médard, 1982; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997) explains the coexistence of formal democratic institutions with informal patronage networks that undermine institutional integrity. In neo-patrimonial systems, authority is exercised through personalised relationships rather than impersonal bureaucratic rules. This is evident in Nigeria's governance structure, where security agencies, regulatory bodies, and anti-corruption institutions are frequently subject to political influence. A notable

case is the 2019 Kogi State governorship election, during which security operatives were accused of facilitating voter intimidation and violence, including the widely reported killing of Mrs Salome Abuh (Ogundipe, 2019). Such incidents illustrate the selective application of state power and the politicisation of institutions, both hallmarks of neo-patrimonial governance.

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives is both necessary and analytically justified. *Prebendalism*explains the motivational logic of political behavior, why actors seek office primarily for material and group advantage. Elite Theory explains the structural concentration of power, demonstrating how a small ruling class maintains dominance over political and economic systems. Neo-Patrimonial Theory, in turn, explains the institutional mechanism through which formal rules are systematically undermined by informal networks of loyalty, patronage, and personalised authority.When synthesised, these frameworks provide a robust explanatory model for understanding how Politics *Nigeriana* subverts democratic governance, constrains national development, and intensifies insecurity. For example, Nigeria's multidimensional poverty rate, which affects over 133 million citizens (NBS, 2022), cannot be divorced from elite-driven resource allocation patterns and weak institutional accountability. Similarly, recurring insecurity, ranging from insurgency in the North-East to banditry in the North-West—is reinforced by governance failures rooted in patronage politics and institutional fragility. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) further notes that weak governance and inequality significantly increase the risk of violent conflict, a pattern clearly observable in Nigeria's contemporary security landscape.

Ultimately, this integrated framework demonstrates that Nigeria's governance challenges are not merely administrative or technical shortcomings, but are deeply embedded in historical patterns of elite domination, prebendal resource distribution, and neo-patrimonial institutional decay. By combining these theories, the paper offers a more nuanced and comprehensive explanation of the structural and behavioural foundations of democratic subversion in Nigeria, thereby providing a stronger basis for analysing its implications for national development and security.

Components, Features, and Principles of Democracy

Democracy is widely recognised as a system of government in which political power ultimately resides with the people, exercised either directly or through freely elected representatives. It promotes the rule of law, participation, accountability, and the protection of human rights. Although it assumes different forms globally, certain fundamental components, features, and principles are universally associated with democratic governance. These elements form the structural and normative foundation of any democratic state and are crucial for ensuring legitimacy, responsiveness, and good governance (Held, 2006; Dahl, 1998).

Components of Democracy

The components of democracy refer to the fundamental structural elements that enable its effective functioning. These elements encompass not only institutional mechanisms but also normative principles that sustain participatory governance and safeguard political freedom. At the heart of democracy is the people, the electorate, who hold the ultimate authority to determine leadership and influence policy through elections and civic engagement. The political will of the people is sovereign and is expressed through democratic participation (Dahl, 1998). Constitutional governance provides the legal framework within which democratic institutions operate. Whether written or unwritten, the constitution defines the separation of powers, fundamental rights, and the limits of governmental authority. It upholds the supremacy of law and establishes mechanisms for its enforcement (Dicey, 1959; Sartori, 1987).

Representative institutions, such as legislatures, executives, and judiciaries, function in accordance with constitutional provisions. These bodies are designed to operate within the principles of checks and balances, ensuring accountability and preventing arbitrary rule (Lijphart, 1999). Regular, free, and fair elections are essential for sustaining democratic legitimacy. Conducted under impartial and transparent conditions, they enable citizens to choose leaders, express political preferences, and hold public officials accountable (Przeworski et al., 2000).

The rule of law ensures that no one is above the law and that all actions, public or private, are subject to legal scrutiny. It guarantees legal certainty, equality before the law, and the protection of fundamental rights (Raz, 1979). Finally, a vibrant civil society and the principle of pluralism are indispensable to democracy. Civil society fosters public discourse, advocates for accountability, and defends civil liberties, while pluralism allows diverse interests, ideologies, and groups to coexist and engage meaningfully in democratic processes (Habermas, 1996).

Features of Democracy

Democratic systems, despite their historical and institutional variations, share certain defining characteristics that uphold their legitimacy and functionality. At the core is popular sovereignty, the principle that authority originates from the people, who grant power to their representatives within a legal framework. This foundation ensures that democratic legitimacy stems from the consent of the governed (Beetham, 1991). Closely linked to this is political equality, which guarantees every individual equal political rights, including the right to vote and to seek public office. Such equality reinforces the democratic ideal of fair representation and inclusion (Dahl, 2000). A further essential feature is the balance between majority rule and minority rights. While majority rule typically determines policy outcomes, safeguarding the rights of minorities is critical to preventing tyranny and ensuring inclusive governance, an equilibrium central to liberal democratic theory (Rawls, 1993). This is complemented by transparency and accountability, where elected leaders and public officials must remain answerable to the public. Transparency enables scrutiny of government actions, while

accountability mechanisms such as legislative oversight and independent audit bodies ensure responsible and ethical leadership (Schedler, 1999).

Institutionally, democracy is strengthened by the separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. This system of checks and balances prevents the over-concentration of authority and promotes institutional integrity (Montesquieu, 1748; Vile, 1998). An independent judiciary further reinforces this structure by applying laws impartially and protecting rights without political interference, serving as a guardian of constitutionalism and democratic order (Bingham, 2010). Equally vital is freedom of expression and the press, which sustains open public discourse and enables citizens to critique policies and influence decision-making. These freedoms, alongside the right to assembly, foster active civic engagement (Mill, 1859; O'Donnell, 1994). Finally, robust political participation, whether through voting, public consultations, activism, or involvement in political parties and interest groups, enhances governmental accountability and responsiveness, ensuring that democracy remains a living, participatory system (Verba, Schlozman& Brady, 1995).

Principles of Democracy

The principles of democracy encompass the ethical and normative values that sustain democratic governance and shape its practice. At the core is the rule of law, which ensures that governance is conducted according to clear, general, and equally applied legal rules. This principle obliges both rulers and citizens to operate within legal boundaries, thereby safeguarding order and justice (Fuller, 1969). Another foundational element is the consent of the governed, whereby governments derive legitimacy from the people's approval, typically expressed through free and competitive elections. Without such consent, political authority shifts from being democratic to authoritarian (Locke, 1689; Rousseau, 1762). Complementing this is the principle of limited government, which imposes constitutional constraints on state power to protect individual liberties and ensure that authority is exercised within legal and institutional limits (Hayek, 1960).

Democracy also rests on the respect for human rights, encompassing civil, political, social, and economic rights that protect individual dignity, equality, and freedom from arbitrary state interference (Donnelly, 2013). Closely linked to this is equality before the law, which demands that all individuals, regardless of status or background, are treated equally in legal processes, promoting justice and curbing discrimination (Rawls, 1971). Finally, civic responsibility underscores the role of active citizenship in sustaining democracy. Citizens are expected to uphold democratic norms, fulfil civic duties, and defend the core values of freedom, equality, and justice (de Tocqueville, 1835). In essence, democracy is more than a set of institutions; it is a system grounded in principles that integrate structural mechanisms, such as electoral systems and representative institutions, with ethical commitments like popular sovereignty, political equality, and the rule of law. For democracy to flourish, these principles must not only be codified in law but also deeply embedded in the conduct of political actors and embraced by the wider society.

Brief trajectory of Democracy and Nigeria's Political Culture

The trajectory of democracy is the product of centuries of political evolution, shaped by struggles against autocracy and gradual institutional refinement. Its roots lie in ancient Athens of the 5th century BCE, where free male citizens participated directly in governance, a system excluding women, slaves, and foreigners. During the Enlightenment, thinkers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau advanced principles of liberty, popular sovereignty, and the social contract (Held, 2006), inspiring revolutions such as the American (1776) and French (1789). Britain's parliamentary model and 18th–19th century reforms further embedded democratic norms. By the mid-20th century, democracy had become a global aspiration, affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (United Nations, 1948).

In Africa, democracy's path was shaped by colonial legacies. European powers imposed centralised systems that undermined indigenous governance. After independence in the 1950s–60s, nations like Nigeria inherited top-down structures that often entrenched authoritarianism. Nigeria's democratic journey began in the 1950s with limited self-government, leading to independence in 1960. The First Republic (1963–1966), modelled on Britain's parliamentary system, collapsed amid electoral fraud, ethnic tensions, and regional rivalry, prompting a military coup (Diamond, 1988). Subsequent decades alternated between civilian and military regimes. The Second Republic (1979–1983), based on a U.S.-style presidential model, was similarly overthrown. Military dominance persisted until the 1999 transition to the Fourth Republic (Suberu, 2007), Nigeria's most enduring democratic phase. However, despite regular elections, the system is undermined by malpractice, violence, and weak institutions. The 2007 elections drew widespread condemnation for rigging and voter suppression (Musa, 2023). The EU Election Observation Mission (2019) also cited inconsistencies, poor verification, and opaque vote cancellations affecting 2.8 million registered voters.

Nigeria's political culture is marked by clientelism, ethnic loyalty, and elite dominance. Patronage often trumps accountability, and parties lack ideological coherence, functioning mainly as elite platforms. Between 2018 and 2019, over 60 lawmakers defected across party lines (Dappa, Enyioko & Yenda, 2025). The cost of participation is prohibitive; some gubernatorial candidates spent billions of naira in 2023 despite 63% of Nigerians living in multidimensional poverty (NBS, 2022). Social programs like SURE-P and TraderMoni are often deployed as campaign tools (Nwangwu, 2025).

Ethno-regionalism shapes competition through the informal "zoning" arrangement, which rotates power among six geopolitical zones to foster inclusivity but also entrenches sectionalism. The 2020 #EndSARS protests, met with deadly force (Amnesty International, 2023), revealed tensions between civic activism and state authority.Yet, signs of renewal are emerging. The 2023 elections saw a surge in youth engagement, over 70% of new registrants were aged 18–34, with students comprising 40% (The Republic, 2023; Tayo, 2023). Social media is amplifying civic

mobilisation, challenging elite dominance. While the 1999 democratic transition was a milestone, consolidating gains demands stronger electoral integrity, inclusive governance, and expanded civic education to secure Nigeria's democratic stability.

Factors Contributing to Abuse and Divergence from Orthodox Democratic Principles

The divergence from orthodox democratic principles in Nigeria and several other developing democracies stems from a confluence of historical, institutional, socio-economic, and political factors. One major historical contributor is the legacy of colonial rule, which established a highly centralised and authoritarian state structure that lacked mechanisms for citizen participation. The British colonial administration governed Nigeria through indirect rule, empowering traditional authorities while excluding the broader population from political processes. This legacy produced a political culture that prioritised obedience to authority over civic engagement, and these tendencies continued post-independence (Mamdani, 1996).

Military intervention in politics further eroded democratic norms. Nigeria experienced six successful military coups between 1966 and 1993, with successive regimes suspending constitutions, dissolving democratic institutions, and ruling by decree. This entrenched authoritarianism and weakened public faith in democratic processes. The annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, considered one of the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history, by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, demonstrated blatant disregard for electoral legitimacy and significantly delegitimised democratic aspirations (Diamond, 1995). Although the Fourth Republic ushered in a return to civilian rule in 1999, the political culture remains coloured by militaristic tendencies, including the use of security forces to suppress opposition and civil protest.

Another key challenge to Nigeria's democratic consolidation is the institutional weakness of both the electoral commission and the judiciary. Although the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has introduced reforms such as biometric voter registration and electronic transmission of results, it remains susceptible to political interference and suffers from chronic underfunding. A striking example occurred during the 2019 general elections, when INEC abruptly postponed the presidential vote just hours before polls were due to open, citing logistical setbacks (Mbah,2019). According to ActionAid Nigeria (2019), such eleventh-hour disruptions not only dampened voter turnout but also cast serious doubt on the commission's independence and operational competence. Compounding these issues is the judiciary's credibility crisis. In numerous electoral dispute cases, court rulings have appeared to favour political interests, raising concerns about judicial impartiality and eroding public confidence in the legal system as a reliable avenue for electoral justice.

The monetisation of Nigeria's political process continues to erode the foundations of democratic governance. Campaign financing remains largely unregulated and opaque, creating fertile ground for corruption, elite domination, and the marginalisation of ordinary citizens. As Chinye Jnr (2023) observes, the influence of money politics has intensified from 2015 through

the 2023 electoral cycle, marked by soaring campaign expenditures, rampant vote-buying, and persistent regulatory failures. These financial hurdles limit political participation to affluent individuals or those backed by influential sponsors, reinforcing entrenched systems of godfatherism and political patronage. As a result, elected officials are often more beholden to their financiers than to the electorate, thereby undermining democratic accountability and representation.

Ethnic and religious divisions also contribute to the distortion of democratic practice. Nigeria's federal character principle, designed to ensure equitable representation across regions and ethnic groups, has at times fuelled tokenism rather than genuine inclusion. Political mobilisation is frequently based on identity rather than policy, and this has bred exclusion, marginalisation, and, in extreme cases, violence. For example, the 2011 post-election violence, which erupted in 12 northern states following the victory of Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian, resulted in over 800 deaths and widespread displacement (HRW, 2011). This underscores how ethno-religious polarisation undermines national unity and democratic tolerance.

The role of security agencies in political interference and voter intimidation is also noteworthy. Security forces are often deployed to manipulate electoral outcomes under the guise of maintaining law and order. During the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Rivers and Lagos States, multiple observers including Yiaga Africa and the Situation Room reported cases of voter suppression, ballot snatching, and excessive military presence in opposition strongholds (Yiaga Africa, 2023a). Such actions not only violate democratic norms but also suppress voter participation and confidence.Furthermore, media manipulation and disinformation campaigns distort public discourse. Political actors frequently co-opt both traditional and social media to spread propaganda and misinformation. The 2019 elections saw a surge in fake news, deepening political polarisation and misinforming voters. In response, the Nigerian government proposed controversial regulations on digital platforms, which many civil society organisations perceived as veiled attempts to suppress free speech rather than curb false information (Paradigm Initiative, 2020).

Lastly, widespread poverty and low civic education hinder active citizen participation in democratic processes. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022a,b), over 133 million Nigerians (equivalent to over 63%) live in multidimensional poverty. This economic vulnerability makes citizens susceptible to vote-buying and other forms of electoral inducement. Moreover, inadequate civic education leads to limited understanding of democratic rights and responsibilities, resulting in voter apathy and limited demand for accountability.Thus, the abuse and deviation from orthodox democratic principles in Nigeria are driven by a complex mix of historical authoritarian legacies, institutional fragility, socio-political inequalities, and elite dominance. Rectifying this divergence requires a multidimensional approach that strengthens democratic institutions, enforces campaign finance laws, promotes civic education, ensures judicial independence, and fosters inclusive political participation. Without these reforms,

democracy in Nigeria risks remaining a hollow ritual rather than a substantive expression of the people's will.

Key Features of Politics*Nigeriana*

Politics *Nigeriana* is characterised by enduring patterns that have shaped governance since independence. These include ethnic balancing, religious considerations, *prebendalism*, zoning, godfatherism, monetised campaigns, weak party ideologies, corruption, electoral malpractice, judicial manipulation, and elite resistance to reform. Rooted in historical legacies and sustained by entrenched interests, these interconnected dynamics continue to define how political power is contested, distributed, and exercised in Nigeria.

Ethnic and Regional Politics

Nigeria's political landscape is profoundly influenced by its more than 250 ethnic groups spread across six geopolitical zones. Since the First Republic (1963–1966), political parties have tended to align along ethnic lines, the NPC (Hausa-Fulani), AG (Yoruba), and NCNC (Igbo) being early examples (Suberu, 2001). Today, voting patterns and elite negotiations still reflect these divisions. The post-1999 "zoning" arrangement, which rotates the presidency between North and South, aims to foster unity and prevent domination. Transitions from Obasanjo (South-West) to Yar'Adua (North-West), Jonathan (South-South), and Buhari (North-West) illustrate this practice. However, zoning often entrenches ethnic competition and sidelines merit-based leadership.

Religious Influence

Religion remains central to political mobilisation, shaped by Nigeria's near-even split between Christians (predominantly in the South) and Muslims (predominantly in the North). Political parties often balance tickets along religious lines, such as the Obasanjo–Atiku (1999) and Jonathan–Sambo (2011) pairings. However, the APC's 2023 Muslim–Muslim ticket of Tinubu and Shettima drew criticism, particularly from Christian communities in the Middle Belt and South-East. Religious leaders, including Bishop Matthew Kukah and Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, frequently influence political discourse, making religion both a unifying force and a source of division (Paden, 2005).

Prebendalism

Richard Joseph's (1987) concept of *prebendalism*, treating public office as a means to distribute state resources to loyalists, remains deeply entrenched. Practices such as nepotism, inflated constituency projects, and politicised appointments weaken governance and erode public trust. The 2016 "budget padding" scandal is a notable example (Adebayo, 2016).

Patronage and Godfatherism

Political "godfathers" sponsor candidates in exchange for loyalty, contracts, and influence. Bola Tinubu's dominance in Lagos politics since 1999 and LamidiAdedibu's control over Oyo State, which triggered the 2003 Ladoja–Akala crisis (Human Rights Watch, 2007), exemplify this phenomenon. Such patronage systems often marginalise reformists and obstruct accountability.

Money Politics

Electoral competition in Nigeria is heavily monetised, with wealth often outweighing competence. Vote buying is pervasive, 22% of voters reported offers of money or favours in 2023, compared to 17% in 2019 (Uthman, 2024). While the Electoral Act imposes spending caps, enforcement remains weak; both the APC and PDP exceeded limits in 2019 (Stears, 2023). High campaign costs sideline young and reform-minded candidates, reinforcing corruption.

Electoral Malpractices and Violence

Nigerian elections are marred by fraud, voter suppression, and violence. The 2007 polls were widely condemned as deeply flawed (European Union, 2007), and contests from 2019 to 2023 saw intimidation in Lagos, Rivers, and Kogi. In the 2019 Kogi gubernatorial race, violence claimed at least four lives (Atoyebi, 2019). Politicians frequently deploy armed youth gangs to influence outcomes.

Weak Ideology and Defections

Most political parties lack coherent ideologies, functioning primarily as vehicles for personal ambition. Frequent defections, such as AtikuAbubakar's multiple party switches, reflect opportunism over principle. Waves of pre-election defections in 2019 and 2023 weakened party discipline and voter confidence (Adeduyite, 2025).

Centralised Federalism

Despite its federal structure, Nigeria's power is heavily centralised in the presidency, which controls security forces and major revenue streams. State governments rely extensively on federal allocations. Disputes over oil revenue in the Niger Delta and resistance to state police reforms highlight ongoing tensions (Suberu, 2001).

Youth Exclusion and Gerontocracy

Although over 60% of Nigerians are under 30, political leadership is dominated by older elites. The 2018 Not Too Young To Run Act lowered age limits for office, but high nomination fees and monetised politics still block youth access. Young people are often mobilised for campaigns rather than decision-making, contributing to discontent seen in the 2020 #EndSARS protests (Yiaga Africa, 2023b).

Corruption and Impunity

With Nigeria ranked 145th of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, corruption remains systemic. While agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)have secured convictions, enforcement is often selective. The case of James Ibori, convicted in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2012 after evading Nigerian prosecution, underscores domestic institutional weaknesses. Many politically exposed individuals retain influence despite allegations of graft.

Judiciary and Manipulation

The judiciary plays a crucial role in electoral justice but faces serious credibility challenges. In both the 2019 and 2023 presidential disputes, public confidence in judicial neutrality was low. Conflicting judgments and political interference undermine the rule of law (Ayika, 2022; PLAC, 2025).

Civil Society and Media

Civil society organisations and investigative media serve as watchdogs, exposing corruption and advocating reforms. Outlets like *Premium Times* and groups like Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP)and theCentre for Democracy and Development (CDD)challenge government misconduct. Social media has strengthened mobilisation, as seen during #EndSARS, but state attempts to regulate digital spaces, such as the 2021 Twitter ban, illustrate ongoing tensions between activism and state control.

Implications of Politics*Nigeriana* for National Development and Security

Nigeria's political evolution has been marked by a fundamental dissonance between the formal adoption of liberal democratic models and the persistence of deeply ingrained informal power dynamics. This fusion has produced what may be aptly termed Politics*Nigeriana*, a system marked by personalised rule, patron-client networks, electoral manipulation, politicisation of security, and ethno-religious exploitation. Unlike established democracies where institutions outlast individuals, Politics *Nigeriana* often reduces the state to an extension of political incumbents, undermining democratic accountability and development planning.

One of the most significant implication is that the political culture fuels institutional fragility and democratic instability. For instance, the 2007 general elections, widely condemned by international observers such as the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), European Parliament (EP) were riddled with irregularities, including ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, and result falsification. This not only eroded public confidence in electoral integrity but also emboldened elite manipulation of democratic processes (EU EOM, 2007). More recently, the 2023 elections, despite technological innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), were again marred by reports of vote suppression, logistical

failures, and violence in Lagos, Rivers, and parts of the Southeast, highlighting the persistence of systemic dysfunction (Yiaga Africa, 2023a).

The politicisation of security institutions is another major implication. Security agencies are frequently deployed not to protect citizens, but to suppress opposition and enforce the will of ruling elites. A striking example is the 2019 governorship elections in Kogi State, where security operatives were implicated in widespread voter intimidation and violence, culminating in the burning alive of a PDP women's leader, Mrs. Salome Abuh (Ogundipe, 2019). Such abuses breed a culture of fear and silence, marginalising dissent and weakening civic space. This undermines the social contract, erodes trust in governance, and obstructs democratic consolidation.Furthermore, the system fosters a culture of impunity and elite dominance, where the rule of law is routinely subverted. Political godfathers, particularly at state levels, wield disproportionate influence over candidate selection, resource allocation, and policy implementation. A classic case is the influence of political patrons in states like Rivers and Kano, where succession politics often reflect the dictates of powerful individuals rather than transparent party primaries. This suppresses internal party democracy, excludes credible aspirants, and entrenches a rent-seeking political elite.

Economically, politics*Nigeriana* undermines both investment and sustainable development. The business environment remains volatile, with political unpredictability, insecurity, and corruption serving as major deterrents to investors. Data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) shows that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows to Nigeria declined by 21.21% in 2020 to $2.6 billion, the lowest level since 2005, and further fell to $2.2 billion in 2021, with political risk and insecurity identified as key factors (Bailey, 2021; UNCTAD, 2022). Alli (2024)estimates that Nigeria loses about $29 billion annually due to poor infrastructure and institutional inefficiencies. This figure represents roughly 17% of Nigeria's GDP. This loss is attributed to various factors, including inadequate electricity access, poor road conditions, and inefficiencies in government institutions (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTD, 2022), which are largely driven by elite mismanagement and entrenched political corruption.

Another implication is the weaponisation of ethnicity and religion, which fuels violence and deepens national fragmentation. The frequent resort to identity politics, seen during electoral campaigns where candidates appeal to ethno-religious sentiments rather than policy competence, has incited violent clashes and civil unrest. The 2011 post-election violence, which left over 800 people dead and displaced 65,000, remains one of the starkest reminders of the lethal consequences of political manipulation of identities (Human Rights Watch, 2011).Moreover, the failure to address systemic inequality and exclusion entrenches underdevelopment, especially in the northern regions. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022a,b) revealed that over 133 million Nigerians (equivalent to over 63%) lives in multidimensional poverty, with northern states like Sokoto, Zamfara, and Jigawa accounting for the highest incidence. This economic deprivation, fuelled by decades of misgovernance and elite self-enrichment, provides fertile ground for

insecurity, such as banditry and insurgency, which in turn weakens state capacity and diverts resources away from development.

Finally, Politics*Nigeriana* impedes institutional reform and inclusive governance. Reforms such as electoral amendments, restructuring, or anti-corruption measures are often stalled or diluted by entrenched interests. For example, despite public pressure, the Electoral Act Amendment Bill faced delays and opposition until 2022, and even then, critical provisions on electronic transmission of results remained contentious(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022). Similarly, anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC and ICPC are often accused of selective prosecutions, eroding their credibility and effectiveness.In essence, the findings indicate that the entrenchment of Politics*Nigeriana* poses a direct threat to democratic deepening, equitable development, and national security. It creates a political environment where rule of law is subverted, insecurity is politicised, economic opportunities are monopolised by elites, and national unity is undermined. Addressing these issues requires not just constitutional or institutional reforms, but a fundamental transformation of Nigeria's political culture, anchored in accountability, transparency, civic education, and genuine democratic practice.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this paper provide substantial empirical support for the multi-theoretical framework adopted for the analysis, particularly the propositions of *Prebendalism* Theory (Joseph, 1987), Elite Theory (Pareto, 1935, 1963; Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956), and Neo-Patrimonial Theory (Médard, 1982; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). The evidence demonstrates that the challenges confronting democratic governance, national development, and security in Nigeria cannot be explained solely by institutional inadequacies. Rather, they are deeply rooted in enduring patterns of elite dominance, patronage politics, personalised authority, and the instrumental use of state institutions for private and group interests. The findings therefore reinforce the argument that political behaviour and governance outcomes in Nigeria are significantly shaped by informal political practices that operate alongside formal democratic structures.

First, the findings strongly validate *Prebendalism* Theory, which posits that political office is often regarded as a resource to be appropriated and utilised for the benefit of office holders, their associates, and their socio-political constituencies. Joseph (1987) argues that public offices in Nigeria have historically been perceived as prebends from which incumbents are expected to derive material benefits and distribute patronage to supporters. The findings reveal the persistence of political *godfatherism*, patron-client relations, rent-seeking practices, and the allocation of public resources on the basis of personal, ethnic, regional, and partisan considerations. These patterns corroborate Joseph's central thesis that political competition in Nigeria is frequently driven by access to state resources rather than by ideological commitments or developmental objectives. Furthermore, the persistence of corruption, poverty, unemployment, and inadequate public service delivery despite Nigeria's abundant natural resources is consistent

with scholarly arguments that prebendal politics diverts public resources away from productive development and undermines state capacity (Lewis, 2007; Diamond, 1999).

Second, the findings affirm the fundamental assumptions of Elite Theory, which contends that political power is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small but influential minority that dominates decision-making processes within society. Classical elite theorists such as Pareto (1935, 1963) and Mosca (1939) maintained that every political system is governed by a ruling elite, while Mills (1956) argued that political, economic, and institutional power tends to be concentrated among interconnected groups with common interests. The findings reveal that political influence in Nigeria remains largely concentrated among a narrow political class that exercises considerable control over party structures, candidate selection processes, resource distribution, and governance outcomes. The recurring phenomenon of candidate imposition, the influence of political godfathers, and the dominance of established political actors in electoral contests illustrate the continued relevance of elite domination within the Nigerian political system. These findings support scholarly observations that democratic institutions in many developing states often function within contexts where elite interests significantly shape political competition and public policy (Ake, 1996; Osaghae, 1998).

Third, the findings substantiate the assumptions of Neo-Patrimonial Theory, which explains the coexistence of formal bureaucratic and democratic institutions with informal networks of personal loyalty, patronage, and clientelism. According to Médard (1982) and Bratton and van de Walle (1997), neo-patrimonial systems are characterised by the fusion of public and private interests, whereby formal institutions exist but are frequently subordinated to informal power relations. The findings demonstrate that, despite operating within a constitutional democratic framework, political interactions in Nigeria are often mediated through personalised relationships, patronage networks, and informal structures of influence. The persistence of patron-client linkages, the strategic distribution of political favours, allegations of selective enforcement of public accountability mechanisms, and the influence of informal political networks on governance processes illustrate the continued salience of neo-patrimonial practices. Such realities lend credence to the neo-patrimonial argument that formal democratic institutions frequently coexist with, and are sometimes constrained by, informal systems of authority and political exchange.

The findings further reveal a significant convergence of prebendal, elite, and neo-patrimonial dynamics in shaping what this paperconceptualises as Politics*Nigeriana*. While *Prebendalism*Theory explains the appropriation of public office and state resources for personal and group advantage, Elite Theory illuminates the concentration of political and economic power within a relatively small ruling class. Neo-Patrimonial Theory, in turn, provides insight into the informal mechanisms through which such power is exercised, reproduced, and legitimised. The interaction of these dynamics contributes to governance deficits, democratic limitations, socio-economic inequalities, and persistent developmental challenges. Consequently, the findings suggest that Politics *Nigeriana* represents a complex political phenomenon in which formal

democratic institutions are frequently influenced by informal patronage structures and elite interests.

Ultimately, the findings confirm that Politics*Nigeriana* is not merely a reflection of weak institutional capacity but rather a deeply entrenched political culture sustained by elite dominance, patronage networks, and personalised systems of authority. This deduction is consistent with broader scholarly literature on African politics, which emphasises the enduring influence of informal political institutions in shaping governance outcomes (Hyden, 2006; Chabal &Daloz, 1999). The paper therefore concludes that meaningful democratic consolidation, inclusive national development, and sustainable security in Nigeria will require reforms that extend beyond institutional restructuring to address the underlying prebendal, elite, and neo-patrimonial practices that continue to shape political behaviour, public policy, and governance outcomes.

Conclusion

The trajectory of Nigeria's democratic journey reveals a persistent tension between constitutional ideals and political realities. While the country has embraced democratic frameworks on paper, the lived political experience is dominated by a hybridised and often distorted system, Politics*Nigeriana*, which undermines the principles of good governance, national development, and security. This system is sustained by patronage networks, electoral fraud, ethno-religious manipulation, elite impunity, and institutional decay. The abuse of democratic structures under this political culture has not only weakened public trust in governance but also exacerbated insecurity, discouraged investment, and eroded the social fabric of the Nigerian state.

The consequences of Politics *Nigeriana* are stark and multidimensional. Economically, it stifles innovation and equitable resource distribution; politically, it engenders instability and exclusion; socially, it deepens divisions and undermines national unity; and from a security perspective, it fuels insurgency, banditry, and civil unrest. The prevalence of vote buying, as witnessed in Ekiti and Osun States during the 2022 gubernatorial elections, and the intimidation of voters and opposition figures in various elections, confirm the urgent need to address democratic backsliding (Ayobami&Akpolome, 2023). Without a deliberate and sustained transformation of Nigeria's political culture, democratic governance will remain a façade, with development and security perpetually at risk.

Recommendations

i. *Strengthening Democratic Institutions:*Nigeria must prioritise the independence and capacity of institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the judiciary, and security agencies. Their autonomy must be protected through legal reforms that prevent executive interference, while investments in training, technology, and oversight mechanisms should be expanded to promote transparency and accountability.

ii. *Comprehensive Electoral Reforms:* Electoral integrity is the bedrock of democracy. The Electoral Act should be continually refined to include full biometric accreditation, electronic transmission of results, and strict penalties for electoral offences. Electoral offenders, including sponsors of violence and thuggery, must be prosecuted without bias, regardless of political affiliation.

iii. *Institutionalising Internal Party Democracy:*Political parties should adopt transparent and participatory processes for candidate selection. The era of *godfatherism* and imposition should give way to competitive and merit-based party structures. The Nigerian Political Parties Registration and Monitoring Committee (PPRMC) should be empowered to monitor party conduct and enforce sanctions.

iv. *Civic Education and Democratic Socialisation:*Citizens must be educated on their rights, responsibilities, and the value of democratic participation. Civil society organisations, faith-based groups, and educational institutions should play a central role in cultivating a democratic ethos, particularly among youth and first-time voters.

v. *Decentralisation and Constitutional Restructuring:* To reduce the overcentralisation of power and foster local accountability, Nigeria should revisit the 1999 Constitution with a view to devolving more powers and resources to states and local governments. Fiscal federalism and resource control mechanisms can encourage competition, development, and responsiveness at subnational levels.

vi. *Addressing the Political Economy of Violence:*A comprehensive strategy to disrupt the political financing of violence is critical. Political actors who recruit and arm thugs must be held accountable. Simultaneously, economic empowerment programmes targeted at unemployed youth, especially in violence-prone regions, will reduce the pool of potential recruits for political violence.

vii. *Promoting Inclusivity and Gender Equality:*The persistent exclusion of women, youth, and minority groups from political processes must be tackled. Legislative quotas and affirmative action policies should be adopted and enforced to guarantee more representative governance.

viii. *Establishing a National Political Culture Reform Commission:*Nigeria should consider the establishment of an independent body mandated to lead political reform advocacy, monitor democratic practices, document violations, and publish periodic reports on the health of democracy in Nigeria.

Ultimately, reversing the challenges posed by Politics*Nigeriana* requires a synergy of top-down reforms and bottom-up democratic renewal. Political elites must embrace statesmanship over personal gain, while the citizenry must demand accountability and uphold democratic values. Only through a collective commitment to democratic integrity can Nigeria achieve lasting development, social cohesion, and national security.

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