

**NIGERIA'S POLITICAL EXECUTIVE ELITE:  
PARADOXES AND CONTINUITIES, 1960-2007**

Henry Aniagoa Kifordu

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ISBN 978-90-815873-6-5

# Nigeria's Political Executive Elite: Paradoxes and Continuities, 1960-2007

De politieke elite van Nigeria:  
Paradoxen en constante factoren, 1960-2007

## Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the  
Erasmus University Rotterdam  
by command of the Rector Magnificus  
Professor dr H.G. Schmidt  
and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board

The public defence shall be held on  
22 December 2011 at 16.00 hrs

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*Dedicated to*

*God Almighty that remains impartial where and when mortals arbitrate with pride,  
procrastination and prejudice.*

*My son for his love and inspiration, my mother for her bravura and unreserved love,  
the memory of my father who departed while this struggle lasted and  
all Nigerians that earnestly struggle and hope for a better society.*



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## Acknowledgements

I am eternally grateful to the following persons, agencies and organizations for their contributions during my extended and intermittent fieldwork in Nigeria: my cousin and distinguished member of the Association of Retired Police Officers of Nigeria (ARPON) and Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Timothy Anyira (Esq), and his cherished wife; thanks to my brother G.E. Kifordu and his wife R.C. Kifordu, sister Maureen Kifordu, dear nephews and nieces with other brothers and sisters of the Kifordu family; brethren in blood and Christ, Ozo Oshai and his wife, Ann; Paul Anyira of the Nigerian Ministry of Defense, Abuja; Mohammed of Arewa House in Kaduna; the staff and workers of the National Archive in Kaduna; the library officers of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), National Library Kaduna and Yaba, Lagos; Professor Dumoye of ABU, Zaria; Professor Nwaolise of University of Ibadan (UI), Ibadan, the staff and workers of the National Archive at UI, Ibadan; the Presidency; Federal Ministry of Information, The Presidency and the People's Democratic Party, all in Abuja, Nigeria. My esteemed regards to Marilyn Martins of Vital Aids and Justina for the friendly support.

The support given by the staff and students of the international Institute of Social Studies for the realization of this study is no less fundamental. My special thanks to my supervisors, Professors Wil Hout and Mohammed Salih. Prof. Hout remained unwavering even under turbulence. Thanks to Prof. Ben White who was there when I most needed organizational support and Dr. Helen Hintjens for insisting that I keep on despite the travails. My due respect goes to all ISS professors who teach and research for a better world. I am equally grateful to the staff of the Institute's library for their valuable services, especially during my extensive search for relevant literature. My special thanks to Joy Misa for the estimable formatting service, Martin Blok for the friendly gesture, Ank vd Berg for the bluntness, Sylvia Cattermole and John Sinjorgo for the amicable receptions. Thanks to Maureen Koster for encouragement and timely advice when everything else

seems amiss and Dita Dirks for the regular attention at the PhD secretariat. The wonderful moments of camaraderie shared with all PhD fellows during my time will ever remain fresh in my memory. To A. Blandon, J. Awortwi, J. Agbonifo, L. Serino, Lu Caizhen, P. Hatcher, D. Oshi, Y. Akinwumi, R. Ampadu, A. Yessoufou, M. Georgina, B. Dito, G. Otieno, P. Goulart, M. Elgeziri, L. da Costa, S. Jayasundara, M. Cifuentes, A. Corradi, T. Kida, S. Karim and L. Haifang, I say thanks for the companionship.

I give accolade to the distinct persons and groups whose efforts and cordiality at the various international conferences I participated in who helped jolt my thesis forward. These are the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference held by the University of Connecticut's Political Science Department in the USA, the 2008 International Conference at the Maastricht School of Governance, the 2009 UNU-WIDER Conference at the United Nations University in Finland and the special wing of the 2009 Development Dialogue at the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, The Hague, The Netherlands.



## Abstract

This study is concerned with the circulation, composition and character of the core political executive elite in post-colonial Nigeria over successive political regimes and with changing sources and levels of government revenue. The true riddle is perhaps not the instability of the post-colonial governments, as manifest in the frequent regime breakdowns accompanied by rapid turnover of the political executive elite. Rather, the larger puzzle lies in the composition and interactivity of the political executive elite since Nigeria's independence in 1960. The incessantly troubled manner in which political leadership has changed raises serious doubts about societal influence on elite circulation, composition and character, and by extension, on the political system. This leads to the main question of this research, which is twofold: What social background and styles of interaction have characterized the circulation and composition of the core political executive elite in Nigeria? Have core political executive elite patterns limited the scope of the political system through the succession of different governments with shifts and influxes of economic resources in the post-colonial period?

The main objective of the study is to analyse the historical and dynamic composition of the core political executive elite by looking at the periodic circulation (flow) of elite members from specific social and interaction backgrounds. The study argues that despite structural changes (in terms of political regime and economic resources) and an explicit policy to draw members of the political executive from various social backgrounds, the preferences of the government elite have been largely divorced from societal demands, such as political liberties and civil rights. The political executive elite have relied on the support of a political class which operates through informal and elusive networks linked to political parties and state power. Thus, instead of typical national social structures, Nigeria's political executive elite has depended on the political class for support; and both have relied on state resources for survival.

The current study contests the unique relationship proposed by Marxist theory between economic power and political power. Yet even more so, it refutes liberal-pluralist assumptions. Autonomous social groupings and a neutral state do not appear to be a valid basis of elite composition and character in influential political offices in post-colonial Nigeria. The analysis draws on critical elite theories which focus on common social background and network arrangements through which a power elite group operates and persists in upper echelon positions. Critical elite theorists argue that political offices may be transformed from a base for serving society to a bastion to secure the special interests of the elite. They further contend that the common social background which permits elite persons to intermingle produces group coherence and stimulates the use of large and important social institutions to achieve special interests.

Unlike the triumvirate composition of the power elite model, this study traces five groups of elite in Nigeria: the socio-cultural, traditional, military, economic and political. Each is linked to the operation of social networks, political parties and state institutions. Based on this outlook, the study uses social background data collected and classified from running records since colonial times to analyse the circulation, composition and character of the elite in political executive offices in Nigeria. Longitudinal analysis and network approaches are employed to deepen understanding about the characteristic composition of the political executive elite as political regimes and economic resources changed over time. The study reveals certain paradoxes and continuities in the composition of the core elite. Common social background, selective informal networks integrating political class supporters, recurrent appearances and socially dysfunctional attitudes characterize elite circulation, composition and continuity in political executive offices.

More importantly, structural changes, such as new regimes and substantial influxes of government revenue, have not been managed in such a way as to produce significant positive outcomes except nominally on elite circulation and composition. In fact, typical attitudes (rent-seeking, patronage, coercion, corruption, ethnic manipulation and 'godfather' politics) are a continuing feature of elite composition in political executive offices. Both civilian and military rulers have over time trampled on political liberties and civil rights. Not only have the preferences of the Nigerian political executive elite diverged from societal interests, but elite attitudes and practises have restricted political liberties and civil rights, while contributing to retard the growth of the political system. In all, elite special interests associated with the use of selective social background and interactive network devices have marginalized important social groups from decisive political processes.

Co-optation of likeminded persons into political offices has reinforced the social similarity of the core national executive elite. But it has also dampened social awareness, which seems to contradict Marxist propositions about the activation of such awareness for radical social change. In a more intriguing manner, the observed pattern of elite flows in political executive offices contradicts the liberal-pluralist assumption of power diffusion. At first, the diverse social backgrounds observed in political offices of the country seem in agreement with the idea of cross-cutting power inclusion proposed by the liberal pluralists. But a closer look at the composition and character of the political executive elite reveals a cohesive group of carefully selected persons from a common social background and network of political class members. Thus, a paradox marks the relationship between the circulation and characteristic composition of the core political elite, resulting in impeded social participation and political development. This paradox implies not only elite continuities in political power and roles but also the weakening of the very institutions that are supposed to support political system development. This anomaly calls for coherent political action against the flaws in the political system in such ways that revitalize its potentially most dynamic inputs – the people's demands.



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## Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek gaat over de roulatie, samenstelling en aard van de politieke regeringselite in postkoloniaal Nigeria tijdens opeenvolgende politieke regimes, waarbij de bronnen en de hoogte van de overheidsinkomsten wisselden. De instabiliteit van de postkoloniale regeringen, die blijkt uit de veelvuldige regimewisselingen die gepaard gaan met een snelle vervanging van de politieke regerende elite, is misschien niet zo raadselachtig. De samenstelling en interactie van de politieke regerende elite sinds de onafhankelijkheid van Nigeria in 1960 vormt een groter raadsel. De steeds problematische wisselingen van het politiek leiderschap trekken de maatschappelijke invloed op de roulatie, samenstelling en aard van de elite, en daaruit voortvloeiend, op het politieke systeem, ernstig in twijfel. Hieruit volgt de belangrijkste onderzoeksvraag: Hoe was de roulerende politieke regeringselite in Nigeria samengesteld wat betreft sociale achtergrond en interactiestijlen, en heeft dit de reikwijdte van het politieke systeem beperkt door een opeenvolging van verschillende regeringen met verschuivingen in de influx van economische middelen in de postkoloniale periode?

Het hoofddoel van het onderzoek is de analyse van de historische en dynamische samenstelling van de politieke regeringselite door te kijken naar de periodieke roulatie (flow) van leden van de elite met een specifieke sociale achtergrond en een bepaald netwerk. In het onderzoek wordt betoogd dat ondanks structurele veranderingen (wat betreft politiek regime en economische middelen) en het principe dat leden van de politieke top een verschillende sociale achtergrond moeten hebben, de voorkeuren van de politieke elite afwijken van wat de bevolking wil, zoals politieke vrijheden en burgerrechten. De politieke regeringselite rekent op de steun van een politieke klasse die functioneert op basis van informele en ongreepbare netwerken die banden hebben met politieke partijen en overheidsmacht. Dit betekent dat de politieke regeringselite van Nigeria afhankelijk is van de steun van de po-

litieke klasse, en niet van de kenmerkende nationale sociale structuren. De politieke regeringselite en politieke klasse zijn beide voor hun voortbestaan afhankelijk van overheidsmiddelen.

In dit onderzoek wordt de Marxistische theorie dat er een unieke relatie is tussen economische en politieke macht in twijfel getrokken. Tegelijkertijd worden liberaal-pluralistische aannames weerlegd. Een autonome sociale achtergrond en neutraliteit van de staat zoals voorgesteld door liberaal-pluralisten lijken niet de basis te zijn voor de samenstelling en aard van de elite die invloedrijke politieke posities bekleedt in postkoloniaal Nigeria. Het onderzoek maakt gebruik van kritische elitetheorieën die stellen dat een machtselite functioneert en zich handhaaft in de bovenste echelons door een gemeenschappelijke sociale achtergrond en netwerkverbanden. Aanhangers van de kritische elitetheorie stellen dat politieke posities soms verworpen van een plaats om de maatschappij te dienen tot een bastion voor het veiligstellen van de specifieke belangen van de elite. Zij betogen verder dat de gemeenschappelijke sociale achtergrond die de onderlinge omgang vergemakkelijkt zorgt voor samenhang binnen de groep en bevordert dat men grote en belangrijke sociale instellingen gebruikt om specifieke belangen te behartigen.

Dit onderzoek gaat niet uit van het model van de machtselite als triumviiraat, maar van de veronderstelling dat in Nigeria de activiteiten van veel verschillende elitegroepen (sociaal-culturele, traditionele, militaire, economische en politieke) verbonden zijn met de werking van sociale netwerken, politieke partijen en staatsinstellingen. Vanuit deze optiek haalt het onderzoek gegevens over de sociale achtergrond van de elite uit archiefstukken die teruggaan tot in de koloniale tijd om de roulatie, samenstelling en aard van de politieke regeringselite in Nigeria te analyseren. Longitudinale analyse en netwerkbenaderingen verschaffen een dieper inzicht in de kenmerkende samenstelling van de politieke regeringselite door de jaren heen onder wisselende politieke regimes en economische middelen. Uit het onderzoek blijken bepaalde paradoxen en constante factoren in de samenstelling van de politieke top. Een gemeenschappelijke sociale achtergrond, selectieve informele netwerken waarvan aanhangers van de politieke klasse deel uitmaken, terugkerende politici en sociaal disfunctionele attitudes kenmerken de roulatie, samenstelling en continuïteit van de elite in politieke regeringsfuncties.

Nog belangrijker is het feit dat structurele veranderingen, zoals nieuwe regimes en een substantiële stroom overheidsinkomsten, niet hebben geleid tot significant positieve resultaten, behalve theoretisch op het vlak van de roulatie en samenstelling van de elite. In feite zijn typische attitudes (rent-

seeking, patronage, dwang, corruptie, etnische manipulatie en 'maffia'-politiek) steeds kenmerkend voor de samenstelling van de elite in politieke regeringsfuncties. Zowel de civiele als militaire autoriteiten hebben in de loop der tijd politieke vrijheden en burgerrechten met voeten getreden. De voorkeuren van de Nigeriaanse politieke regeringselite wijken niet alleen af van maatschappelijke belangen, maar de praktijken die kenmerkend zijn voor de attitudes van de elite hebben politieke vrijheden en burgerrechten aanzienlijk beperkt, terwijl ze de groei van het politieke systeem hebben vertraagd. De specifieke belangen van de elite in combinatie met het selecteren op sociale achtergrond en netwerkverbanden hebben ervoor gezorgd dat belangrijke sociale groepen gemarginaliseerd worden bij beslissende politieke processen.

Bovendien heeft de co-optatie van gelijkgestemden in politieke functies de sociale vergelijkbaarheid van de nationale regeringselite versterkt. Het heeft het sociale bewustzijn echter verminderd, wat in tegenspraak lijkt te zijn met Marxistische opvattingen over de activering van een dergelijk bewustzijn voor radicale sociale verandering. Het is nog intrigerender dat het geobserveerde fluctuerende patroon van de elite in politieke regeringsfuncties ingaat tegen de liberaal-pluralistische aannames over de verspreiding van macht. Op het eerste gezicht zijn de schijnbare verschillen in sociale achtergrond in overeenstemming met het liberaal-pluralistische idee van macht bij een dwarsdoorsnede van de bevolking. Maar bij nadere beschouwing is de politieke regeringselite een hechte groep van zorgvuldig geselecteerde personen met een gemeenschappelijke sociale achtergrond en een gemeenschappelijk netwerk van leden van de politieke klasse. Er is dus een paradoxale relatie tussen de rotatie van de politieke elite en de kenmerkende samenstelling van deze groep, die de sociale participatie en politieke ontwikkeling in de weg staat. Deze paradox brengt niet alleen een continuering van de elite in politieke machtsposities en rollen met zich mee, maar verzwakt ook de instellingen die het politieke systeem zouden moeten ondersteunen. Dit vraagt om eenduidige politieke actie tegen de tekortkomingen van het politieke systeem waardoor de inbreng die potentieel het meest dynamisch is – de eisen van het volk – weer aan kracht wint.



# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Main Issue

This thesis is concerned with the circulation, composition and character of the core political executive elite at the national level of government in post-colonial Nigeria. It analyses the composition and character of the core political executive elite and looks at its members' circulation in political offices as political regimes and economic resources changed over time in the post-colonial period. Since independence from British colonial rule was peacefully negotiated and finally achieved in 1960, Nigeria has relentlessly sought a sustainable political order to replace the colonial one. However, the Nigerian polity has experienced erratic changes in government regime and in economic resources. The country has been marked by long, successive periods of military dictatorship interspersed with short-lived intervals of democratic rule, often preceded or followed by election turmoil. Nigeria's experiences of regime change are thus reminiscent of a badly regulated pendulum that over-swings towards dictatorial acts on one flank while under-swinging to democratic trials on the other.

The twisty shifts of Nigeria's post-colonial regimes have also been associated with puzzling changes at the topmost level of the core political executive elite. This study defines this core elite group as those Nigerians who have ascended to occupy policy supervisory positions at the executive (cabinet or junta) level of national government through the various regime changes in the post-colonial period. Though the period since 1999 has witnessed the longest sustained survival of a political regime, turbulence and violence have nonetheless accompanied past and recent elite power and role successions. The issue here is not just the historical lack of consensus on shifts in regimes or the high incidence of violent

conflict over elite succession in key government positions at the national level. Rather, the major theme of this study is the characteristic pattern of the social composition and character of the elite that has ascended to and retained political power within the national executive government.

Despite the fact that the civilian regime has been uninterrupted since 1999, elite successions, particularly within the topmost executive government offices, have been marked by intrigues, violent dispositions and use of force spreading through general elections. Party primaries are reported to be the outcome of manipulation and co-optation by powerful Nigerian personalities mostly linked to the office of the chief political executive. The worrisome way that Umaru Yar'Adua succeeded Olusegun Obasanjo in the presidency after the 2007 general elections persists unabated. That is, political crises have continued to mitigate constitutional processes of political succession. When Yar'Adua became ill and unable to continue in office (between 2008 and 2009), there was much controversy and opposition to the ascension of his vice president as acting president. Goodluck Jonathan is a minority ethnic group member from the troubled Niger Delta zone. He was practically 'handpicked' by Obasanjo, i.e. through the People's Democratic Party (PDP) primaries, as vice-presidential candidate to Yar'Adua. It is worth recalling that the PDP primaries were visibly overshadowed by the personality and position of Obasanjo as incumbent president. Despite the growing number of political parties in the country since 1999, the PDP has won all of the presidential elections. The crisis that marked Jonathan's ascent to the office of the president lingers on to this day, i.e. after Yar'Adua's incapacity and following from Jonathan's victory in the 2011 presidential election. Since the current succession crisis began in 2008 in the federal capital of Abuja, Nigerian society has been seriously upset by violence, including bloody terrorist attacks in 2010 and 2011. The acute crises around political successions since colonial rule in Nigeria have continued to raise unanswered questions about the composition and pattern of the Nigerian political executive elite.

'Composition' is here understood as the outcome of circulation in upper echelon political executive offices under specific regimes. 'Circularity' thus denotes a periodic change in the participation of the different elite types or categories (e.g. age, sex, professional and communal attributes) in government positions of political executive power and roles. In turn, 'pattern' entails the regularities observed in elite turnover, i.e. the

composite nature of the core political elite as the effect of participation in political executive offices over time and space. The qualitative circulation of political elites in top government positions is at least theoretically considered an important aspect of the social and political order needed for stability and development. Society in post-colonial Nigeria has nurtured high expectations of a responsive and responsible political elite composition. This expectation conveys a unique meaning. The historical and dynamic pattern of political elite circulation (based on who participates or is excluded) in policymaking processes is of great significance to the promotion of political order and political legitimacy. Nigerians also express a continued desire to overcome the colonial legacy syndrome (bequeathed problems from colonial rule). Therefore, the modus operandi or simply the processes and outcomes of political participation remain of great concern.

The Nigerian political elite display a curious attitude towards social order, especially the establishment of the formal political institutions needed to support state actions. Since the colonial period, the Nigerian political elite ostensibly implemented various structural changes. Apart from the different transitions to liberal democratic constitutions, the Nigerian political elite have been trying out the *consociational* model of democratic governance. For example, the 1979 constitution institutionalized the 'Federal Character' principle designed inter alia to promote the equitable distribution of political offices, particularly at the national executive government level, through the appointment of ministers that reflect national character. If ethnic hierarchy (pyramidal ethnic majority-minority power relations) has been a social obstacle to political participation in Nigeria, the 'Federal Character' principle and its related informal zoning formulae were supposed to engender elite cooperation and compromise, based on the liberal-pluralist values of openness and inclusiveness. These latter elements, however, reflect not just a quantitative measure of representation but also the quality of social interest representation (Verba 2003).

The concern of this study is not merely to document changes over time in elite composition but also to explain the *quality of change* through the circulation or recirculation of the elite in political power and roles. The significance of elite circulation for the wider 'representativeness' of the political system is also examined. Thus, this study's concerns include the extent to which quantitative changes in authority structures are

meaningful and go beyond elite replacement, as in change-of-the-guard or cabinet reshuffles, which can be characterized as purely nominal changes in political executive composition. If physical replacements in the power composition of the elite mostly produce dynamics without fundamental shifts in the attitude and behaviour of political actors towards political objects, qualitative changes become unlikely.

The lack of qualitative changes in political elite circulation can reduce the prospects for a stable social and political order. Contrary to conventional (liberal-pluralist) theory's expectation of change based on representative class dynamics, there can be elite recirculation without meaningful political change (i.e. in a 'democratic' or 'representative' direction). In post-colonial and oil-rich Nigeria, the nature of social forces as they developed historically, and still mobilize and influence political dynamics, could provide important clues about *who's who*, *how* and *why* in the political system. In all, the current study raises doubt about the coherence of the composition and character of the core political executive elite with socially pervasive needs and demands. It also questions the renewal of the authority structure as regimes and resource-use patterns have changed in the post-colony. Therefore, the study queries the extent to which the composition and character of the political elite, through periodic circulation within the national executive government, agrees with the historical and dynamic processes and outcomes of political power-sharing (i.e. dispersal) and renewals since colonial rule.

To consider some of these issues, this study focuses on the historical and dynamic composition of the core political executive elite. Attention is especially directed to the specific characteristics, forms and preferences shared by the Nigerian political elite as political regime and economic resources changed through the post-colonial period, i.e. over the course of several decades. The study seeks understanding about the formation processes and character assumed by the core political executive elite. Such understanding pervades the extent to which elite values and interests (i.e. 'preferences') correspond to the dominant social and economic order. The study is thus interested in the degree to which Nigeria's political elites share a certain distinctive background and familiar political preferences as important structural changes occurred in the post-colonial period.



## 1.2 Basic Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

### 1.2.1 Polarization Between Marxist and Liberal Assumptions

Social science and political science differ in their perspectives on how the elite forms and circulates in government. The respective theories reveal a great deal about the background and characteristics of the elite vis-à-vis political office-holding. However, they use different concepts and terminologies, ranging from Marxist-oriented approaches that analyse ‘class conflict’ to the ‘individualistic liberal’ or ‘political modernization’ schools of thought. Elite theories can thus be said to straddle two opposites: Marxist and liberalist. Marxist and neo-Marxist theories are inclined to conceive power as being considerably concentrated within the elite, or dominant economic class, which is in turn internally cohesive, thus tending to truncate social change mostly through state power (Poulantzas 1969, Gramsci 1971, Olsen and Marger 1993).

Yet Marxist and neo-Marxist theoretical conceptions of elite foundations and relationships with the state have their weaknesses. Marxist theory considers structural changes to be influenced through the elevation of class consciousness and radical changes in the power structure (see Crompton 1998, Welsh 1979). In other words, the theory tends to be deterministic in terms of how political elites arise from economic and resource-based structures of relationships, while it ignores the role of ethnic identities and appeals to ‘organic’ notions of democratic politics (Mann 2005: 69). For liberal pluralists, political leadership exercises its agency in the short term, and this corresponds to structured rules and roles enshrined in democratic laws and institutions (Levinsky and Ways 2006). Put differently, liberal pluralists consider the internalization of governing norms to be the basis for attenuating the long-term needs of strong leadership, i.e. through a concentrated and centralized authority structure.

Liberal-pluralism hinges on the belief that power is relatively ‘competitively’ distributed; so it is dispersed not only within the elite but also among society members in such a way that circulation over time can lead to real transformation in elite composition (Dahl 1977, Diamond et al. 1977, Olsen and Marger 1993). Structural changes, in the form of a more open political regime and market-oriented resource use, are expected by the pluralists to enhance political elite circulation (Lipset 1967, Dahl 1971, 1989 and 1999, Diamond et al. 1988, Diamond 1983, 1993a,

1993b, 1997, 2004 and 2008, Diamond and Morlino 2004). Hence, the shift from a centrally dominated to a pluralistic social order is believed to create a political structure that ‘automatically distributes political resources and political skills to a vast variety of individuals, groups and organizations’ (Dahl 1971: 77).

Since the 1980s, neo-pluralists have recognized the enlarged and excessive structure of the state and reiterated the need for increased literacy, education and communication so as to decentralize political skills and produce a stable political order (Manley 1983, Dahl 1989, 1999). As Hannan and Carrol argued, the ‘decentralization of political skills presumably creates conditions for effective opposition to coercion and for the creation of special-interest movements’ (1981: 20). More importantly, the stability of the pluralistic order is said to derive from social enlightenment, which enhances the accommodation of a new elite ‘representing social strata with varying goals and interests’ by the old elites ‘sharing similar perspectives’ (Dahl 1971: 37). Consequently, the character (quality) and composition (inclusiveness) of the political elite are expected to change (through political regime and economic resource changes) from a closed and unaccountable disposition to greater openness, cooperation and sense of responsibility. Education is therefore considered to be the basis for changing elite attitudes and behaviour towards a stable social order.

Some scholarly works which have investigated Nigerian elites and those in other observed African countries have adopted Weberian rational approaches to elite formation and attitudes. These authors have favoured a focus on formal education as the basis for elite transformation and consolidation (Smythe and Smythe 1966, see also Lloyd et al. 1960). The common view at independence was that the erosion of traditional values that were based mostly on ethnicity and inheritance would support the creation of a national political leadership (Nnoli 1978, Ayoade 1986, Crowder 1987). Early researchers could not foresee the continuing significance after independence of ethnic politics, rent-seeking, patronage, corruption with ‘godfather’-based political interactions and state capture. That is, modernization theory, based on liberal democratic concepts of ‘political development’, circumscribed their analysis to such typical aspects as political personality and personalization of power.

For example, the view of the supremacy of rational principles enabled Smythe and Smythe (1960), writing on the Nigerian elite shortly after independence, to conclude that Nigeria represented an example of the triumph of educational knowledge and self-made leaders. At the time, it seemed that meritocracy would win out over aristocracy and that inheritance, birthright and personalization of power would gradually be eroded, giving rise to a new national political order that was expected to follow more democratic ‘rules of the game’. That is, a national order bounded by respect for human rights – political, social and economic. Particularly, attention is often focused on the political order in which the elite composition is characterized by respect for political rights and civil liberties. However, the constant tensions over power succession and its persistence without significant social change in post-colonial Nigeria challenge the strict application of liberal concepts and presumptions, especially regarding leadership turnover that decentralizes rather than centralizes state power. In the Nigerian polity, powerful social and informal forces seem to persist that act in support of political power concentration. The present study represents a serious effort to ‘update’ the only existing study of the political elite of Nigeria, which was the Smythe and Smythe original study of 1960.

### 1.2.2 Typical Constraints on Elite Circulation and Composition

Since Nigerian political independence, structural changes have appeared as an open response to the colonial legacy of inherited and undesired political and economic structures. The emergent and succeeding political elite groups of Nigeria have sought to divert the power structure away from colonially inherited structures by multiplying or creating new institutions. In theory, pluralists would recommend the creation or strengthening of existing institutions for political development purposes (Dahl 1971, Diamond et al 1988, see Fukuyama 2004, Smith 2008). However, the vexing issue is how and why elite successions have continually threatened the orderly turnover of political leadership and meaningful representation of social interests. A plausible answer may derive from the Marxist deterministic view about the role of economic factors or the liberal-pluralist perspective on power dispersal based on autonomous group actions and state neutrality. However, in a society where elite leaders appear not only to persist in political power but to demonstrate ineptitude

in attending to social demands through state power, the strict application of Marxist and liberal approaches may not provide the expected answers.

Hence, resorting to the cumulative social background, interests and practices of the elite can provide clues as to the variety of constraints on the effective occupancy of political offices in a heterogeneous social context such as Nigeria. Factors constraining the circulation and composition of a supposedly functional elite group and, by extension, an elite-driven political system can range from two extremes. At one end of the spectrum are historically embedded values and interests (symbolic and material) that individuals or groups share and pursue through state power (Cohen 1972, Chazan 1993, Ake 1995, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006 and 2008); at the other end are differences in social structure (Weber 1968) with persistent patterns of social network that entail informal systems of political relationships (Mills 1956/2000, Einsentadt and Roniger 1984, Bratton and de Walle 1997). Political socialization that is expected to reproduce coherent elite attitudes and behaviour towards political objects, i.e. through formal institutions and interactions (Abrahamson and Inglehart 1995), can in certain contexts derive from informal networks that reproduce power and roles in decisive political executive offices. Informal social networks can support the recurrence instead of circulation of the political executive elite and, by extension, constitute more of a strain than strength for the operation and growth of the political system.

The liberal pluralists' belief that structural changes function to disperse political power and roles responsibly amongst important social groups can be misleading, particularly for understanding the differences that persist in certain contexts such as Nigeria. That is, despite structural differentiation, elite power and roles can endure by recurring and extending through time and space without producing meaningful social change. Marxists rely on structural changes for radically overturning the elite-dominated economic and political order. Notwithstanding, formal political institutions may be penetrated by informal power with outcomes different from Marxist and pluralist expectations.

To start with, structural changes can translate not just to governance reforms that reorder rules for elite admission and dismissal from active service through open regime change (Dahl 1971, Bratton and de Walle 1997). Structural changes also imply the discovery and application of new sources of productive resources for expanding social opportunities

and elite circulation. In some cases, the role of structure especially in (re)moulding elite character and composition can be seriously constrained by extra-structural factors. In post-colonial Nigeria, there has been a coincidence between the economy's mainstay, i.e. natural resources, which is the government's major source of revenue, and centralized state control over this resource. Parallel to the state-centred control of major economic resources in Nigeria, political rights and liberties have historically and currently been a frequent feature of the federal constitution. This paradoxical setting in the Nigerian polity has seemed to persist alongside a peculiar interplay between informal and formal institutions at the political level of state-society relations.

Analysis based on state-centred perspectives mostly point to natural resources as a curse and as a bane of political elite responsibility (see Ross 1997, Karl 2008). In particular, oil proceeds are said to produce a rentier state, corruption and patronage with power centralization that reproduces a powerful elite indifferent to democratic change (Wantchekon and Lam 2004, Wantchekon 2004, Obi 2005). This outlook omits the interactivity between social and material sources of political power that existed before Nigeria's oil revolution in the early 1970s. A more thorough viewpoint would look back to the pre-oil era and include the way the narrow interests of the elite then shaped the political power structure, especially at the political executive level and amid structural changes.

Marxist theory states that the ownership of the means of economic production at the private level of social relations shapes accessibility and control of the state. However, in Nigeria a variety of contradictory factors and mechanisms (e.g. common background and interests operating through informal networks) seems to be at play. In other words, structural changes can be reconditioned to serve paradoxical roles. Firstly, overt institutional changes can facilitate more the convergence than the dispersal of interest representation through, e.g. weak and dysfunctional political rights and liberties. Secondly, typical elite practices (rent-seeking, corruption, patronage exchanges and 'godfather' politics) with shared elite interests secured under weak state institutions can constrain political participation. The outcomes of political elite circulation, composition and character can thus be different from that expected by either pluralist or Marxist theorists. In other words, there can be certain dynamics provoked through institutional proliferation without significant social

changes that imply serious constraints on inclusive and productive elite circulation and composition.

### 1.2.3 Search for an Alternative Theory

This study is not solely concerned with discrediting both or either of the rival Marxist and liberal-pluralist ideas. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate their historical and dynamic weaknesses in the Nigerian context. In particular, it draws on the social background of the elite and the major interactive mechanisms of elite circulation in political executive offices in spite of changes in the country's political and economic structures. In theory and practice, this investigation requires a critical view that permits identification of the principal obstacles to social change which continually challenge the acclaimed liberal-pluralist premises about elite circulation in political offices. The puzzle usually posed by both liberal-pluralist and elite analysts is whether in times of necessity the incumbent political elite seek a renewal of beliefs through changes in the power structure (Welsh 1979, Prewitt and Stone 1993, Parry 1969 and 1969/2006).

The polarized depiction of theories of the elite, i.e. between that of the Marxist and pluralist approaches to elite characteristic (see Miliband 1969, Wetherly 2009), fails to acknowledge the growing scrutiny of the attitudes and behaviour of the elite towards state power and authority (Mills 1956/2000, Woods 1998, Acemoglu and Robinson 2008). Whilst this tradition is not entirely Marxist-oriented, it has provided us with some of the more persuasive analyses of the political power of elites in so-called 'modern' society (Floyd Hunter 1951, Wright Mills 1956/2000, Michael Mann 1986/1992 and 2005, Acemoglu and Robinson 2008). Reflecting on Michels' classic elitist 'inevitability' thesis, Dunleavy and O'Leary (1987) reiterated that in their view, 'though social mobility and elite circulation might increase, government must remain oligarchic' (p. 138). Perhaps the key issue that theory needs to explain is how oligarchies emerge and change, in terms not only of quantity but also quality based on elite circulation, composition and character, and through the occupancy of top government positions of leadership, i.e. political leadership.

If the realism of the classic elitists (Mosca 1939, Pareto 1935 and 1968/1991 and Michels 1968) is strictly followed, the issue is not just a rigid, impermeable and indifferent elite structure in any type of organiza-

tion, including the state, but the impossibility of alternative routes to change. Such pessimism may be induced as being historically correct not only in line with a retrospective look at the West European experiences that inspired such inflexible political thought but also in view of recent African contexts, including Nigeria. However, caution is needed in discussing past experiences due to the problem of unique path-dependence. Human agency is believed to operate in all social contexts based on particular institutional choices and organizational capacities for achieving determined goals (Mann 1986/1992, 2005).

The search for an alternative theory does not necessarily mean the enthusiastic acceptance of liberal thought with the high premium it places on the social dispersal of political power and equilibrium in society. Though the idea of power dispersal among autonomous groups emerged as a pragmatic political formula designed to enhance the social equilibrium, it is not without serious limitations. Firstly, the presence of autonomous groups is required to operationalize competition, and values must converge in such a way as to generate consensus (Mann 1982). In societies that are more ethnically divisive than homogeneous, autonomy and common values may appear far-fetched. Secondly, economic and political autonomy of individuals and groups is a necessary prerequisite for participation in and enhancement of the social order.

Disorder can manifest when social interactions, especially at elite levels, generate attitudes and outcomes that differ from social expectations. As Ake (1975) tersely noted, disorder is associated with an acute failure to fulfil roles by actors in interaction. For instance, if political elite circulation entails interaction between occupants of and aspirants to influential government offices, then circulation contributes crucially to the social order. Because what is political relates to state activities and to those who make influential decisions through state power (*ibid.*), the circulation, composition and character of the political elite can be associated with the authoritative control over the distribution of social, economic and political resources in society. Hence, if resources are distributed highly unequally, social order can be impaired.

The classic elitists (Mosca, Pareto and Michels) perceived the dangers of relying on the social division of labour that enables certain individuals or groups to rise above the ordinary and perpetually dominate others. However, the classic elitists lost hope of the possibility for real social change after investigating the rigid structure of rules and rulers that dom-

inate modern societies, even under democratic rule. This historical observation, directly linked to the experiences at the time of their writing, appears to have blocked the vision of progress based on the open possibilities of change. For example, they did not foresee the momentum of organized social groups and movements towards change (Burton and Higley 1987, Scott 2007).

Based on historical experiences, the road to social change, particularly political development through increased social participation, can be resisted by powerful groups who benefit from the old order. However, the same historical experiences instruct the determination and capacity of change agents to overturn social barriers and establish a social order that benefits more than a few individuals or groups. What is important, particularly for the position assumed in this study, is the identification and analysis of the major constraining factors to change in the political context of Nigeria. Such identification follows from critical analysis of elite political power and roles based on common social background and interests. However, as social background and interests cannot separately provide the dynamics for elite activities at the state level, it becomes necessary to identify the real social device that supports political executive office-holding outside, or in conjunction with, the formal means of state-society interactions.

#### 1.2.4 The Main Argument

The main argument of the current study is that the composition and character of the Nigerian political elite that historically and currently hold national executive offices derive from a political class that usurps political power and diverts development away from the people. It is an elite political class that has ascended to power from diverse resources, but relies more on state power and institutions for survival than on the feedback from the Nigerian social structures whose diverse members clamour for elite responsiveness and responsibility. The Nigerian political class operates within convenient and exclusive networks that support a core political executive composition that itself is predatory and disconnected from society. Common background, recurrent appearances and vested interests are linked to typical elite practices such as patronage exchanges and corruption to enhance continuity in political offices and roles. Informal and patronage-based networks and corrupt practices coalesce with the proliferation of bungling (inept) institutions to provide the



dynamics for securing influential political executive positions. Cumulative practices and interests over time underlie the attitudes and behaviour of the Nigerian core political executive elite towards the political system. That is, elite special interests and political office recurrences operate in tandem to set back significant social change, such as protection of political liberties and civil rights. Thus, continuity prevails instead of renewal in the composition and character of the political executive elite, despite the myriad changes in political regime and economic resources since independence in Nigeria. Ultimately, institutional bungling has constricted the protection of political rights and liberties with far-reaching negative effects on the capacity of the political system to effectively function.

### 1.3 Problem Analysis, Justification and Relevance of the Study

#### 1.3.1 Problem Analysis

The 'Richardson Constitution' of 1946 represented a turning point in the foundation of the modern autonomous state of Nigeria. This constitutional reform provided an impetus for significant political change by liberating entrance into political office for Nigerians. Despite its tutelage setting, the 1950s witnessed British decolonization measures, the pioneer formation of full-fledged indigenous federal ministers with a prime minister nominated by the second half of the decade (1957). A zenith was reached in 1960 with the formal declaration of political independence. When independent Nigeria endorsed the Westminster parliamentary system of democracy, none conceived it as the anathema that it turned out to be upon its collapse in 1966.

The Nigerian polity has since decolonization (1946–60) experienced rapid, slow, calculated, miscalculated, reversed, autocratic and democratic changes in government system. Throughout these changes, expectations were continually rekindled that the next set of exalted political executive office-holders, regardless of birth and interest, would live up to the peoples' desire for a political system and state structure that caters minimally for their needs. A problem thus has been the relative coherence of the post-colonial authority structure and social order. This latter, based on Ake's (1975) insight, is understood as the expected levels of relationship between social and political actors in constant interaction.

### 1.3.2 Justification

This study was motivated by the dearth of dynamic historical accounts of the cumulative set-up of the core political executive elite in Nigeria as regimes and resources changed over the post-colonial period. The study focuses on the composition and character of the core political elite, located within the executive branch and between the various centres of state authority. These latter include the legislature, judiciary and bureaucracy as well as the military. The current study considers the political executive elite as intertwined with the political system and the way this system operates. Hence, the research was motivated by the need to clarify the nature of the elite composition within the policy supervisory sphere of state power and, broadly, its implications for Nigeria's political regimes since colonial rule.

The core political executive elite were chosen as the object of study because it is the only power that since the post-colonial period has survived in the policymaking role. Other powers have either become functionally weak or grown extinct. 'Core political executive elite' is a designation for the key formal and most visible participants in the decision-making processes of the Nigerian government. The main political positions and occupancies analysed in this study include since political independence: the prime minister, the president (fused or not with the head of state, head of government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces), the vice president, ministers with a portfolio and military junta members. This group of the political executive elite represents the only occupants of the government power structure with exclusive though not necessarily absolute power to declare a state of emergency and with control over the treasury and armed forces of Nigeria in ways that, sometimes, have demeaned other powers. Moreover, in Nigeria, democratic authority seems to be delegative rather than representative, i.e. exercised more through the executive than the legislature (Bratton and Logan 2006). This reinforces the incentive to inquire and learn about the cumulative composition and power features of the political executive elite that by-and-large affect the political system.

Since political independence in 1960, regimes in Nigeria have been analysed as some variant along the spectrum from democratic to authoritarian. Indeed, political regimes can tend towards either side or stagnate somewhere in-between. The current study is longitudinal in nature and involves the interplay between multiple factors, many of which are often

sidelined by normatively loaded conventional theories and methodologies. It is therefore historic, dynamic and heuristic (deeply probing and revealing). It aims to divulge the position of the Nigerian political system based on the historical and dynamic composition and characteristic participation of the political elite responsible for making and supervising pervasive policy decisions at the national executive government level.

Studies of elites from the classic views (Pareto 1939, Mosca 1968, Michels 1993, 1968), through the liberal-pluralist versions (Dahl 1971, 1999 and 2003, Diamond et al. 1988), to the more critical power elite and power structure approaches (Hunter 1953, Mills 1956/2000, Domhoff 1987, Robinson and Acemoglu 2006) have variably emphasized the existence of relationships between the composition and conduct of political elites towards the political system. However, most of these studies have focused on the experiences of advanced countries. No such study has examined how the participation of the political elite has contributed to shape the political system in Nigeria.

The current study is not motivated by a desire to identify the democratic road not taken or by fascination with the inevitability of democracy as if it represents a natural course of history. Rather, the study is driven by the wish to understand the typical background and characteristic role assumed by the political elite in national government executive power since the post-colonial period, i.e. as political regimes and economic resources have changed. The political elite of Nigeria is often faulted for ineffective government policies; but it is less well understood in terms of the powers and roles it assumed over the development of the polity since colonial rule. Importantly, the quest for explanations has often and quite exhaustively been confined to external factors, such as colonial legacies or post-colonial interventions.

Without implying that external variables are unimportant, the current research is motivated by a modest objective: to produce empirical evidence and learn about the real status of the political elite at the national executive level as political regimes and economic resources varied over time in Nigeria. This modesty is not a product of a lack of imagination and relevance in a context where political instability appears to favour elite manoeuvring and interests. Indeed, the current attempt to explicate the role of internal factors in shaping national development is not just a routine undertaking aimed to confirm the validity of negative external forces. After all, Nigeria has long been globally portrayed as one of the

few countries of late capitalist development with a relatively large potential to overcome the 'lateness syndrome' (Evans 1976).<sup>1</sup>

Post-colonial literature is dispersed and disorganized on the role of the elite in Nigerian political offices. While the Weberian rational approach focuses on education as the change agent of elite composition, the neo-patrimonial model emphasizes the interface between informal and formal power converted for the benefit of the ruling elites. Smythe and Smythe's (1960) work is based on the Weberian approach and can be singled out because it uniquely focused on the Nigerian elite and the role of education in the expected transformation of the elite power structure. These authors, however, limited their investigation to interviews and archival records, and their analysis omitted consideration of the interplay between social factors outside of education and access to state power and roles.

The Smythe and Smythe (1960) work is nonetheless important because it is the only serious research into the budding elite of Nigeria. However, its need for updating contributes to justify the subject of the current research, which is the Nigerian elite operating at the government level since colonial rule. Other literature has drawn on the neo-patrimonial model in cross-national research (see e.g. Bratton and de Walle 1997) and on the nature of the elite in specific African countries, including Nigeria. Though their findings reveal important features of elite interactions with state power, such as personal rules and rulers, the studies lack in-depth analysis based, e.g. on single-case and focused study of the elite in a particular form and setting.

There are other accounts that point to a steady rise of, for instance, ethnic politics and patronage exchanges. These factors are said to coalesce or harmonize with modernization or structural changes rather than disappearing under the influence of the latter forces (Whitetaker, Jr., 1977, Ayoade 1986). Ethnic politics and patronage exchanges can be viewed merely as specific dimensions of the use of social background by the political elite to ascend to political executive offices. In Nigeria, incumbent governing elites have typically used interactive mechanisms, such as informal networks, for the 'suppression of opposition leaders' since the country's first civilian government from 1960 to 1966 (Nwabueze 1973: 131–137). These are essential dynamics that suggest the exercise of politics in Nigeria beyond ethnic boundaries.

### 1.3.3 Relevance

This study contributes to the debate about the validity of liberal theory in the Nigerian political context. Moreover, the deeper insights that it hopes to offer about the composition and character of Nigeria's political elite could add substance to the literature on opportunities and constraints for social development through political activities. After the revisionist's critique that followed the setbacks in the liberal version of modernization, i.e. as applied in Nigeria, the 'Federal Character' principle became the most visible internal policy measure to emerge from the various structural reforms since political independence. The 'Federal Character' principle was intended as an affirmative action policy based on equity values and on the recommendations put forward by the proponents of consociational democracy. This model of democracy was developed to permit elite cooperation or settlement through cross-cutting social inclusion and concessions of local autonomy.

Cross-cutting inclusion and political concessions of autonomy are designed to empower socially marginalized groups in plural ethnic societies. In these latter, competitive democracy can produce an elite leadership composition linked to majority ethnic groups and marginalization of minority group members from political processes (see Lijphart 1959, 1968/1975). However, the very consociation policy measures that, in the early 1980s, became institutionalized in Nigeria have been seriously criticized. In the face of continued social crisis mostly attributed to the so-called 'ethnic' conflict, critiques point out fault lines in the operatives of the 'Federal Character' principle. For example, achievement is considered as mostly sacrificed to the benefit of ascription and to the detriment of expected outcomes (Amuwo et al. 1998/2003).

The current study considers the relevance of structural factors, mainly economic conditions, as emphasized not just by liberal adepts inclined to underline the role of economic development prerequisites but also by Marxist literature, which stresses the unique role of economic factors in determining economic elite orientations towards state power. This study departs from the critical elite theories to analyse and reveal not just the occupancies of political executive offices, but also the different social groups and backgrounds from which the political elite hail. Based on empirical evidence about the composition of the national executive elite, this research contributes to bridge some of the knowledge gaps about the demeanour of Nigeria's political elite, who shape political action

through their circulation in particular elite functions. The study observes the historical distribution and composition of the political elite in various core executive offices. It therefore has the potential to recommend corrective policy actions. These latter can be usefully directed towards promoting a more socially acceptable power structure and political system, at least one based on responsible participation of the political executive elite.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The main research question is what historical and dynamic social background and interactive mechanisms have characterized the circulation and composition of the core political executive elite, while limiting the scope of the political system, as political regimes and economic resources changed over time in post-colonial Nigeria. The enquiry is supported by a set of interrelated queries. These start from changes in the country's political and economic structures and extend through to the social background, characteristic participation and explanation for the continuity of the elite in political executive offices as political regimes and economic resources changed since political independence in 1960.

Four sub-questions guide the search for answers to the main question:

- What transformations have taken place in Nigeria's political system since the nation's political independence?
- What are the social backgrounds of the elite participants in core political executive offices since colonial rule?
- Is there a pattern in elite circulation (i.e. participation) and in the occupancy of political executive offices that by extension has constrained the political system since colonial rule?
- How has the composition of the core political executive elite been linked with continuities in political offices as political regimes and economic resources changed over time?

The main objective is to analyse the historical and dynamic composition of the core political executive elite through the periodic circulation (flow) of elite members from specific social and interactive backgrounds. Military dictatorship has marked about two-thirds of the little more than half century of post-colonial experience in Nigeria. Yet there seems to be

an enthusiasm on the part of some Nigerian politicians and political scientists to interpret the country's situation as emerging democracy. This idea of budding democracy requires understanding based not only on the quantity of elections or overt leadership turnover, but also on the participation and character of the political elite in political executive offices.

There are two important aspects in the objective: the changeability of the composition and character of the core political executive elite and its extended effects on the political system. The analytical reference to the political regime neither implies a central focus nor the effect of an exhaustive analysis of political systems. Two significant temporal dimensions of the political system and its relevance are referred to in this study. One is the transformations that are expected, particularly in the composition and character of the political executive elite, as the political system changed over time in Nigeria. This dimension explores alterations in the structure and quality of the political executive elite as the rules governing elite composition and conduct evolved. The second dimension is the extended outcome on the political system's development of the elite's attitudes and behaviour (conduct and practices) towards political office-holding in the national executive government.

There is no definite approach to the predilection to confuse political systems with political regimes (Moore, Jr., 1966, Dahl 1971, 1995, Alvarez et al. 1996, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, Kopstein and Lichbach 2005). The precise conceptualization of the diverse political systems or political regimes produced by history and human imagination has prompted political theorists to settle for a continuum ranging from non-democracies (authoritarian regimes and dictatorship) to democracies. Dahl considers political systems to be the boundaries (governance rules) that limit opportunities for participation in government processes. The political regimes that restrict the chances of participation in political processes to relatively few adult members of society are authoritarian or dictatorial in nature. Hence, those regimes that open such opportunities to a greater variety of authorized adult members of society can be considered democratic (Dahl 1995).

Political regimes do not simply limit the scope for social participation in political processes; they also stipulate the rules and resources for the political game (Fishman 1990, Hyden 1995, Bratton and de Walle 1997). Hyden (1992) is emphatic that 'regimes are not political actors', however, they are associated with specific leaders (pp. 1–26). Political regimes de-

termine not only access but also the sources and resources that actors employ to acquire political positions and the interactions between those who are in power and those who are not (O'Donnell et al. 1986: 73, Fishman 1990: 428). Political regimes thus imply the rules (formal and informal) that limit political power accessibility and modes of relationships (interactions) between actors located at different levels of social power and in different roles (Munck 1996, Bratton and de Walle 1997).

In reality, no political system is pure, so nuanced combinations are possible. The contentious issue centres on the extent and the conditions through which the political system over time tends towards one or the other side of the spectrum characterized, respectively, by contestation or ascription, exclusion or inclusion. The exact structure that political regimes or systems tend towards in any particular social setting remains obscure in the literature. Hence, there is little consensus about blended regimes, referred to imprecisely as hybrid regimes or regime hybridity. 'Hybrid regime' is thus an amorphous concept that simply describes a type in which 'partial regimes within the political regime are democratic, while others are non-democratic, though not necessarily authoritarian' (Zinecker 2009: 302–331).

This study is not concerned with the variety of political regimes or the exact forms assumed in post-colonial Nigeria. Rather, it examines the structure of opportunity and constraints presented under different political regimes and actors. The analysis is initially focused on the rules and resources that define the political game. Thereafter, the focus shifts to social composition and characteristics, in terms of the quantity (numbers) and quality (types and attitudes) of political executive elites that, by extension, affect the scope of the political system. In essence, the purpose of incorporating structural changes in the study is to recognize the periodic changes in political regime and economic resources that since colonial rule were expected to alter and coherently stir elite conduct towards political objects (e.g. authority and responsibility).

The approach taken is theoretically and analytically realistic, making it suitable for understanding the Nigerian case. The approach derives from critical elite theories of social change plus the shared preferences of political leaders reflecting their socio-cultural, economic and political background. Unlike dominant classic elite theories with an elite superiority or dominance thesis, the critical elite versions are more pliable, i.e. they admit adjustments towards the socialization of the power structure. For



example, its proponents do not consider positive social change under the elite to be impossible, but they are alert to the importance of elite transformation through the renewal of ideas and interests amid changing circumstances (Prewitt and Stone 1993). The critical elite approach thus appears to provide a more pliant theoretical basis than the rigid classic elitist thesis of an inescapable aristocratic order whose dominant attributes at all times implies a blockade of the prospect of social change.

Concern about the typical formation and continuity pattern of the Nigerian political executive elite offices under circumstances of flux in the Nigerian polity leads this study to assume a critically theoretical and methodological stance. The study builds on periodic and longitudinal analysis of political elite background. Most pertinently, it uses a political sociology approach concerned with elite interactivities to analyse the composition through the circulation and character of the elite types that have ascended to and retained political executive offices at the national government level since political independence. Elite continuity in power and roles is therefore explainable through social background and network characteristics tied to cumulative values and interests instead of to preferences traceable to society at large.

## 1.5 Structure of the Study

This study is structured in seven chapters including this introduction as the first chapter. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework. It draws mainly from the critical elite theories that portray the relationship between political elite circulation, common social background and socially embedded interests that limit the political system.

The third chapter deals with methodology and provides details about the sources of data, strategies for data collection and analysis methodologies. It describes the adequacy and use of social background and longitudinal design to classify and analyse archival data. The chapter also highlights the use of social network analysis for understanding elite interactions (intermingling and interchanges) and mutual support enhancing continuity in political power and roles.

The fourth chapter initiates the empirical analysis with a historical account of the Nigerian political system through various periods and phases since independence. The chronology reveals the historical and dynamic changes in political regimes and economic resources, which could

be expected to transform elite conduct into a strengthening of the political system.

The fifth chapter analyses the participation of the Nigerian elite in core political executive offices based on social background. The sixth chapter presents a deeper examination of the composition and character of the political executive along the lines of political party organizations and social networks. It involves the analysis of certain observable social practices of the core political executive elite that have emboldened their continuity in political power and roles while considerably affecting the political system.

The seventh and final chapter offers conclusions about the circulation, composition and character of the core political executive elite as political regime and resources have changed over time and space in Nigeria.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Lateness syndrome refers to the difficulties of delayed entrance to capitalist development.

## 2

# The Core Political Executive Elite: Framework for Understanding the Nigerian Case

## 2.1 Core Political Executive Elite Images and Scope in Nigeria

### 2.1.1 Competing Views about the Nature of the Elite

This study views the ‘core political executive elite’ as a historically persistent uppermost segment of the larger social and political elite hierarchy of the Nigerian polity. There are various perspectives on the elite as a broad and influential social component. Many scholarly positions imply a polarization between Marxist economic class determinism with its view regarding the concentration of political power and pluralist assumptions of power dispersal under a neutral state. However, a certain consensus appears in the respective literatures that the elite constitute a tiny and organized portion of society with valued and varied superior resources (Pareto 1968, Mills 1956/2000, Keller 1963/1991, Etzioni-Halevy 1993, Dahl 1971, Dogan 2003). This view of small and influential elite with a varied resource base says nothing about the way power is exercised and in whose interests in a particular context, such as Nigeria.

Generally, elite studies can be categorized as either Marxist or non-Marxist. While economic factors, especially ownership of the means of production, delimit the social class that, according to a Marxist vision, can ascend to political power to serve the interests of that social class, non-economic elements characterize non-Marxist views. One of the non-Marxist perspectives is ‘critical elite theory’, which considers common background and interests as representing the basis for elite access to and retention of political power and roles. As the current study examines the Nigerian core political executive elite, a productive starting point

is the prevalence of likeminded actors from common backgrounds who deploy network schemes for accessing state resources to their own benefit (and that of their political class supporters) at high social costs.

However, to further clarify the choice for a particular conceptual and analytical framework, the Marxist and non-Marxist positions require additional insights. First, the political elite of post-colonial Nigeria must be situated in terms of its outlook towards changing circumstances, especially the political system. Second, the political executive elite must be derived as a special elite subset with distinctive attributes, i.e. as a set of political actors with certain characteristics in society. Because of its more prevalent adoption, even in Nigeria, the next section starts with liberal pluralism, which is one of the non-Marxist perspectives.

### 2.1.2 The Liberal-Pluralist Version

The liberal-pluralist approach to elite participation in political offices draws much of its strength from Dahl's studies and especially Keller's (1963/1991) strategic or functional elite approach. In *Beyond the Ruling Class*, Keller (*ibid.*) distinguished the strategic elite as a historically and socially significant 'hierarchy' that performs the 'key' or 'most important' functions with pervasive effects within society (pp. 54–60). Higley and Burton (2006) extended this outlook to the political elite, described as 'tiny groups of strategic position-holders with the organized capacity to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially' (p. 5).

The adjective 'tiny' for qualifying elite composition in strategic social spheres such as government or the state is a generally acknowledged starting point based on the relatively small size of the elite. Distinct from character, 'tiny' represents a quantitative dimension in elite characterization. That is, independent of the political regime type, the political elite is considered to be a minority vis-à-vis the entire population (Pareto 1968/1991, Parry 1969/2006, Dahl 1976, Keller 1963/1991, Dogan and Higley 2006) or simply relative to the majority. Dogan and Higley (2006) referred to the tiny size of the elite as so 'infinitesimal' as to 'perhaps' imply 'one person per thousand of the adult population' (p. 1). The small size of the elite in relation to the larger population leads to one of the most historically and dynamically celebrated elite definitions, that is, as an organized minority ruling over a disorganized majority (Pareto 1968/1991, Mosca 1939). Applied to the Nigerian context, it is conven-

ient to distinguish a relatively small number of political executive office-holders who have ascended to and retained political power since colonial rule.

Despite the minuscule size of the elite relative to that of society, pluralists consider social interest representation, i.e. through political party leadership and orientation, to provide the answer to social demands. Different from other political elite subgroups such as legislatures and judges, the political executive elite are considered as exercising typical social roles and influences (Lane 1997, Aberbach et al. 1981). Lane (1997) refers to 'decision-making roles' and 'political leadership qualities' as a distinctive attribute of the political elite (p. 859). More specifically, fulfilling public demands especially through policy supervision and distribution is considered the usual responsibility of political executives.

In open systems, particularly in democratic regimes, the political executive elite is said to embody 'elected or politically nominated members of the cabinet' (a president, vice presidents, ministers, etc.) whose offices correspond with state-delegated power 'to make policy decisions, broker interests and articulate ideas' (Aberbach et al. 1981: 4–15, see also Turner 1997: 317). Usually, the executive branch is composed of a 'select body of decision makers', which Heywood calls 'the epithet of executive membership' responsible for policy supervision (Heywood 2002: 335). In addition to occupying cabinet positions, political executives meet formally and regularly to take decisions or be consulted by the chief executive, who chairs all meetings (*ibid.*).

By virtue of their formal positions and role import, political executives are historically and constitutionally indispensable to the functioning of the polity. The indispensability of the group reposes on policymaking, considered the 'life wire' of government (Heywood 2002). According to the liberal-pluralist view, the composition and character of the political elite should reflect an inclusive and representative social background (Dahl 1971, Diamond et al. 1988, Welzel and Inglehart 2008). Importantly, both parliamentary and presidential systems assign public accountability to the political executive function, though in the former system responsibility accords accountability first to the parliament (Lins 1997, Heywood 2002, Hellwig and Samuels 2007). The roles of the political executive might in some cases be contingent on context development and leadership panache. Apart from presiding over the cabinet and policy decisions, the chief executive might personally accumulate various

roles, whose extension and intensity depend not only on the political or governance regime but also on leadership style, social expectations and support (Dahl 1995).

Another key element in characterizing a core political executive elite group is the broader social context. Looking at the attributes and functions of the strategic elite, Keller (1963/1991) affirmed that the elite co-exists with 'modern industrial societies' and so derives not from a single class but from differentiated social classes (p. 54). This position mostly recognizes the role of professional classes (e.g. the legal, academic, military, techno-bureaucratic and other professional categories), which in open political systems and industrial societies either compete for state power or seek to influence political power-holders. However, Weber (1978) warned that in so-called 'industrial societies' class and status symbols may coalesce with one's origin, role and the influence of political actors to determine one's 'life chances' (Weber 1978: 302–307). A Weberian critique recalls that school diplomas and profession can fuse with ethnic and religious characteristics to form the status symbols for monopolizing political power and roles (Murphy 1988).

Translated to the Nigerian context, the coalescence of professional attributes with ethnic background – or what one analyst calls 'ethnic morphology' (Scaritt 2008: 118–121) – likely forms the basis for elite ascension to and retention of political offices with varied outcomes for the political system at large. While the political system comports such larger dimensions as formal and informal rules guiding social and especially political attitudes and behaviour, most pertinently, it also informs the specific sources and resources for political power-holding. Changes in political systems are usually analysed as the effects of socialization, i.e. citizens' attitudes and behaviour towards political participation (Inglehart and Abrahamson 1995, Verba 2003). Liberal research often neglects the important role of the elite in shaping the political system, especially in heterogeneous contexts with a weakly formed civil society.

Haynes (2005) observed that the liberal position does not refer to 'how specific actors such as leaders view politics', but rather to the people's views of the political system as a whole (p. 181–185). He noted that the post-1960 and post-1970 periods witnessed the critique of the direct focus of political culture studies on the public's perception of the political system while leaders and governing institutions slacken in their performances (*ibid.*). Hence, elite political background is important, but

most important is the interactive mechanisms through which the elite differently manage issues of civil society participation that affect the political system. Put differently, elite background may appear heterogeneous in any society, but the elite can develop mechanisms for acting cohesively towards political objects.

For example, Keller (1963/1991) approached the political elite's background that informs its composite character as 'heterogeneous' and its role as 'strategic' (Chapter 2). Applied to political power, especially at the executive government level, this means that the social background of the elite power-holders should be composed of different and representative professional and interest group leaders who access political offices through competitive means, i.e. based on open political and democratic systems of representation. Holme (2008) reiterated Keller's study as the main component of the 'functional elite' theories, which emphasize elite differentiation, competition and a changed characteristic social origin which relies on achievement instead of inheritance. That is, openness and competitiveness with political debate – amongst competing professional and interest group agents – supposedly constitutes the means for reaching consensus about relevant social issues. Keller's (1963/1991) critique of the social origin of the strategic elite as less related to an 'all-round excellence' and 'overall superiority' (p. 32) thus provides the comparative yardstick for learning, through empirical investigation, about the functionality of elite composition, especially at the decisive national executive level.

However, even when members of the elite have different social backgrounds, elite composition does not inform the scope of its responsiveness and responsibility vis-à-vis public preferences. That is, 'social origin' is crucial for understanding elite composition in political offices but as it is 'no infallible guide to [political] elite-ship'; 'accountability' becomes an 'essential condition to be fulfilled' (Rothwell et al. 1973: 22). Political accountability in liberal-pluralistic orders especially in democratic systems of government underscores elite responsibility in terms of the connectedness of political power and roles with social preferences. As an institutionalized process that demands coherent elite attitudes towards the political system, responsibility implies elite leaders' continual respect for 'previously established consent' vis-à-vis society (Schmitter 2004: 48).

For example, the political elite's respect for such social preferences as political rights and liberties plus the avoidance of corrupt practices are

fundamental to social development and stability of a political system (Hyden 2004, Diamond and Morlino 2004, Welzel and Inglehart 2008). An alternative way to gain insight into accountability by elite office-holders is to assume its counter position, i.e. the elusiveness of elite holders of political offices. The degree to which the elite elude accountability through such erosive practices as corruption and patronage is an indication of the importance attached to it by elite leaders in relation to society demands.

The liberal-pluralist view about the nature of the political elite assumes an open political system with institutional guarantees of political rights and civil liberties through which the elite compete for the most important political offices (Dahl 1971, Diamond et al. 1988). That is, shared institutional values of 'liberty' and 'constitutional respect' for civil and political rights in the elite-masses nexus are considered fundamental to regime stability (Zuckerman 1977: 339, see also Diamond 1997). Moreover, the political elite ascendants to public office, such as political executives, are assumed to be naturally heterogeneously composed in ways that permit debate, compromise and protection of public preferences instead of selective private ones (Keller 1963/1991). The current study argues that the liberal pluralist view conveyed in Dahl's (1971) concept of public preferences reflecting 'the political ordering of values and interests' (pp. 17–32), or simply institutionalized social choices, does not significantly apply to the Nigerian context.

In other words, the historical and dynamic composition of the Nigerian political executive elite is unlikely to be coherent with the strategic elite composition and character. The contention is that elite circulation in the highest political executive offices of Nigeria is deficient of competitiveness, inclusiveness and responsible political practices. In turn, this deficiency leads to weak fulfilment of public preferences, contrasting considerably with the liberal-pluralist assumption of periodic renewals in political offices. Also, the prevalence of common elite background with narrow interests, perpetuated through informal networks for retaining political office positions and converting formal institutional roles to particular uses, represents a paradoxical image and empirical scope of liberal pluralism. Similarly, Marxist assumptions about the determinacy of economic power are little founded in Nigeria. The next section exposes the inadequacy of the linear Marxist (assumes a direct association between



economic and political power) power structure for examining the attitudes of the Nigerian elite towards political objects.

### 2.1.3 Marxist Foundation Unfounded in Nigeria

The Marxist economic class foundation provides an insufficient basis for elucidating the Nigerian case of elite attitudes towards political executive office-holding. Marx and Engels (1847/1848) argued in the Communist Manifesto that ‘the executive of the modern state’ is but ‘a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’ (p. 4). Marx (1982) referred to the ‘dominant or ruling class’ type both ‘economically and politically’ to denote the social class directly tied to the ownership of the means of production and to state control (p. 4). In *German Ideology* (1845–46), Marx and Engels (1970) describe the state as the entity through which ‘the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests’ (p. 80).

Neo-Marxists attempted to re-qualify the original Marxist postulations with arguments about the incorporation of cultural (intellectual) and military (security) elites in the political power circles in ways that enhance the relative autonomy of the state structure. Doggedly, however, neo-Marxists remained tied to the idea of a direct relationship between economic factors and political power (see Poulantzas 1969, Gramsci 1971). The logic of the capitalist state as recognized by certain neo-Marxists is that ‘property is private’ and so ‘political power is prohibited from organizing production according to its own political criteria’ (Offe and Ronge 1982: 250). If state power is separate from ownership and control of the means of production, then Dupuy’s (1991) deduction makes sense, that is, ‘state revenue depends on privately generated profits’ (p. 79). The lack of an outright link between the operatives of the Nigerian post-colonial state and dependency on taxation from ‘privately generated profits’, as counter-posed by Dupuy (*ibid.*) appears to undermine the Marxist linear power assumptions.

In Nigeria, state agents located in key political executive offices seem increasingly interested in rent-seeking, i.e. accruing state resources that are diverted away for personal uses. Rents so defined differ from the reliance of state functions on direct taxation and constitute a source of autonomy of the political class (Wantchekon and Lam 2004, Zinecker 2009). Rents can thus be considered a major elite lure, preceded only by

political power for safeguarding a continuous flow. In particular, the prospect of social revolution as an alternative to elite circulation in political power is in Marxism fraught by the incapacity of the working class to fully mobilize against the capitalist-oriented state (Crompton 1998). This incapacity can vary in time and place but in practice no working class acts have appeared to significantly and consistently threaten or overturn the capitalist system.

In post-colonial Nigeria, a vicious cycle of political power relations seems to exist that seriously limits the prospects of social revolution. Moreover, the literature on the Nigerian polity presents many persuasive arguments and evidence suggesting the invalidity of Marxist economic determinism (Nnoli 1978 and 1995, Madunagu 1982, Omodia 2010).<sup>1</sup> The next section introduces classic elitist propositions about elite composition and character, which are believed to be dependent on superior, organized and varied social backgrounds converging to curtail circulation. In essence, the section takes the first steps towards delimiting a workable elite concept and framework.

#### 2.1.4 Classic Elitist Superior Background and its Relevance

Knowledge, psychology and organization form the basis of the classic elitist argument about the unassailable appearance, cohesion and continuity of the political elite in political office (Pareto 1968, Mosca 1939, 1969, Michels 1968 and 1993). Elite ascension to political power and their continuity in office are said to originate from the ownership of valued and varied resources in society. Pareto's (1968/1991) 'exclusive' elite qualities for ascending to political power include 'education', 'intelligence', 'shrewdness' and 'union' or organizational capacity (pp. 72–81). In Pareto's *Mind and Society* (1935), rule by a relatively small number, described as the 'governing class', suggests an oligarchic composition of rulers whose decisions prevail despite 'universal suffrage' (Pareto 1935: 2,183). In turn, Mosca (1939) stressed elite organization and the role of psychological factors in fostering elite dominance and mass acquiescence.

Similarly, Michels' (1993) 'iron law of oligarchy' model depicts a vertical flow and control of information by the elite that tends towards social differentiation in any organization, such as the state and political parties. Michels' (*ibid.*) comment that 'elite groups and the rank and file mem-

bers' have 'increasingly diverged in their social background, income, interests and capabilities' (pp. 111–124) mirrors the historical and cultural disconnect in the elite-masses nexus in post-colonial Nigeria. Michels has been portrayed as the most disillusioned about the prospects of democratic systems, which he considered fraught by tightly patterned oligarchic power. Olsen and Marger (1993) recall Michels' view as discrediting the pluralistic potential for dispersing political power between social groups in society.

The classic elitist characterization of the political elite is of particular significance, at least, analytically, in the Nigerian context. Unlike the Marxist allusion to the elite class as 'a passing phase in human history', Kelly documented the historical relevance of the classic elitists' 'insistence that the elite are an inevitable feature of complex societies' (Keller 1963/1991: 13). The argument that Nigerian political executives rely on state resources for magnifying their power and role translates to the classic elitists' claim about inequity in the distribution of social power and political control. Also, the classic elitists' idea that varied and valued resources facilitate elite organization and psychological control over society is applicable in Nigeria. Unlike the West European and North American historical experiences which are informed by social homogeneity through class divisions, the Nigerian context suggests differences in social stratification beyond class cleavages. In Nigeria, strongly nested traditional and modern elite networks appear to underscore the ascent and retention of individuals or groups in political office.

### **2.1.5 Power Elite and Power Structure Perspectives in Nigeria**

Mills' (1956/2000) Power Elite provides key insights into the recurrent nature of contemporary political elite characteristic makeup. Earlier elite-centred studies too, such as Hunter's (1953) Community Power Structure, viewed the elite as composed of those 'able to enforce their decisions by persuasion, intimidation, coercion, and, if necessary force' (Hunter 1953: 24). This literature underscores not just the local roots of national political power but also the convergence of interests through political office-holding. Nigeria's multiethnic society represents a source of ascent to and retention of political executive power that may be found to diverge significantly from the preferences of more homogeneous (communal) societies. However, Mills' (1956/2000) power elite model is

most revealing about the ‘major national power’ believed to reside in the ‘political, economic and military domains’ (p. 6).

That is, a triumvirate power structure is assumed to be behind most of the decisions made within today’s enlarged and centralized state bureaucracies, which are unequalled in human history. Mills’ assertions deserve full transcription to enable further understanding of their relevance in the Nigerian context and especially to this study’s line of argument. The point of departure is that the power elite’s superior position in decision making affects the lives of ordinary people:

Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal position: their failure to act, their failure to make such decisions is in itself an act that is often of greater consequence than the decisions they do make. For they are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society (...) They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of the power and the wealth and the celebrity they enjoy (Mills 1956/2000: 1–2).

The cardinal lesson from Mills’ assertions is that it is not for nothing that the members of the power elite occupy command institutions and organizations. In other words, the power elite defend those interests that imply power, affluence and prestige. The defence of these interests and the means employed in such defence guarantee the power elite’s continual retention of control in society.

However, one objectionable dimension of the power elite theory as applied to US society (i.e. compared to the Nigerian case) is its emphasis on the provenance of the ruling elite from the upper class stratum of the society. According to Domhoff (2005), the prevalent elite theory ‘puts far less emphasis on classes or class conflict than is necessary to understand power in the United States’ (online). In Nigeria, the political class represents the source of selective recruitment of members of the national executive who depend on state resources rather than the typical Nigerian social structures for their survival. In other words, the power elite structure in Nigeria depends on state resources instead of feedback from society to realize their political class aspirations. The state, as an organization, can thus be singled out as the means for accumulating political power and wealth mostly to the benefit of the power elite members.

Interestingly, as Mills (1956/2000) stated in a way that is particularly applicable to Nigeria, the ‘unity’ of the power elite rests not only on ‘the development and coincidences of interests among economic, political and military organizations’ but also on ‘the similarity of origins and outlook, and the social and personal intermingling of the top circles from each of these dominant hierarchies’ (p. 292). That is, aside from the direct influence of class attributes, common background can stem from ethnic, regional and religious groups, in addition to political party formations that can be controlled by individuals linked with both informal networks and formal state institutions.

Domhoff’s description of the ‘power elite’ as a network-operated organization also makes particular sense in the Nigerian context. Yet, the idea of network-operated schemes applied to Nigeria is not necessarily that of an ‘institutionally based group that works to maintain the basic social structure from which the upper class greatly benefits’, as claimed by Domhoff and Dye (1987: 190). The idea can be more productively applied as an integrative network system for articulating traditional, military, bureaucratic, economic and political power that mostly benefits the political class usurpers of state resources instead of the social classes. In sum, while the idea of a common social background and network mechanism to enhance elite intermingling dynamics can be applied to the Nigerian context, the circumscription of the power structure (i.e. its composition and character) at the executive level to uniquely Marxist class explanations of political power is at odds with the Nigerian context. Moreover, based on the typical social context of Nigeria, the Nigerian power structure cannot be considered as limited to triumvirate power elite, as defined by Mills (1956/2000). The following sections look at the network system in more detail, as it applies to the Nigerian context.

## **2.2 Elite Networks, Organizations and Institutional Support**

### **2.2.1 Social Network**

The social background of the political executive elite is relevant but not sufficient for understanding the nature of the ties of the Nigerian post-colonial elite with state power and executive roles. Social networks are described as exchange alliances amongst ‘a set of actors’ to whom ‘valued resources are distributed’ through ‘a set of historically developed and utilized exchange opportunities called exchange relations’ and ‘a set of

network connections linking exchange relations into a single network' (Cook et al. 1983: 277). According to Serrat (2009: 1), 'social network analysis seeks to understand networks and their participants' based on the role of 'actors and the relationships between them in a specific social context'.

The crucial point about the Nigerian case is that exchanges, mutual benefits and exclusion are viewed as indispensable in the emergence and development of social networks. The functioning of network schemes has practically underpinned elite circulation, composition and character in Nigerian political executive offices since the end of the colonial era. As Christopolous (2008) warned, not only do 'networks provide the context within which [political] actors thrive', they also constitute a device 'employed to mitigate' the risks borne by 'political entrepreneurs' (pp. 757–778). In the Nigerian case, this implies that the relationship between likeminded actors sharing similar contact arrangements can be considered exclusive if the benefits that are expected for the broader society accrue mostly to network members, while costs are socially shared and social responsibility is continually overruled.

Mills (1956/2000) described elite networks as a cohesive informal 'set of overlapping crowds and intricately connected cliques' through which power and roles are retained (p. 11). The Nigerian political elite can be considered to substitute for and persist with a 'typical' level of legitimacy, i.e. based on a widely embracing but selective network of elite individuals or groups. However, current elite network analysis appears to assume a less pyramidal pattern and to portray elite networks as more pervasive and irresponsible. Wedel's (2009) critical outlook on elite networks seems more current and incisive, as it emphasizes the role of 'flex nets' (or informal flexible networks) that accommodate a set of 'shadow elite' described as 'as elusive as they are ubiquitous' (p. 20):

Rather than climbing Mills' pyramid of the political, military, and business establishment, members of flex nets wield influence by forging coincidences of interest among an array of roles across organizations, whose boundaries and purposes often blend (*ibid.*).

The elusiveness of the Nigerian elite network that supports political executive office-holding can imply the avoidance of accountability and the furtherance of self-interests at variance with social demands. In other words, the national power structure could reveal the convergence of the

‘network of institutions, organizations and roles exercised by individuals’ from the broader society (Domhoff and Dye 1987: 9) but who interact aloof the society.

The elite format deducible from cross-cutting organizational roles in the society reinforces Serrat’s contention that power no longer reposes ‘exclusively in the state, institutions and corporations but in the networks that structure society’ (Serrat 2009: 1; see also Wedel 2009, Rothkoff 2009). Nevertheless, it contradicts the mechanistic view of society in which the formal state structure is an all time intelligent entity, exercising control over society supposedly for social good. As Kennis and Schneider (1991) noted, network analysis portrays ‘a decentralized view of society’ through informal lenses and interpersonal relations (pp. 26–27). In other words, and as will be shown in the next subsection, organizations and institutions directly linked to the society can play crucial roles in elite networks, access to and retention of state power.

### **2.2.2 Organizations and Institutional Support**

In Nigeria, social networks can be observed as drawing their existence from typically complex and bureaucratically articulated organizations spread across the multiethnic and multicultural groups within society. That is, context specificity plays a major role in delimiting the social dynamics of elite participation in political offices. Based on ‘national political elite research’, Knoke (1993) proposed the use of social network analysis to ‘uncover the various cleavages and coalitions’ among groups and actors (pp. 23–45). Social networks, in the Nigerian case, depict the interpersonal or intergroup interactions across selective social, cultural and political divisions. Importantly, social network organizers can be assumed as capitalizing on social cleavages and party coalitions to defend vested interests through the Nigerian state.

Networks, as Michels (1968) noted, are used in elite analysis for securing the oligarch’s haven through the co-optation of opposition members. Organizations considered by Michels as crucial for realizing social interactions aimed at retaining political power are political parties. Couparsson and Cleg (2006) reiterated that Michels’ Political Parties represents ‘one of the most interesting examples of intricately tied dynamics of oligarchy and democracy’ (pp. 327–328). It follows that networks use organizational resources that accrue not only from formal institutions but

also from informal structures to strengthen a particular group's hold on power and roles. If the Nigerian case suggests the existence of the political elite's aloofness, any meaningful analysis of changes in office-holders (circulation) or the lack thereof in the political executive elite structure requires consideration of the role of informal institutions under the aegis of social networks.

Organizations such as political parties, the military and ethnically or network organized groups seeking political power in contexts such as Nigeria are respectively disciplined by formal and informal norms and values. The new institutional view about formal and informal power that analytically underlies the framework of elite actors from common backgrounds and network arrangements rests on the use of institutions to constrain social attitudes and behaviour for particular purposes (North 1991, Mann 1992, Mortel 2003). The relevant point is made by Lourdes (2002), according to whom institutional values can be 'circumvented or manipulated by certain individuals or groups of actors' (pp. 91, 104).

Circumvention and manipulation can imply that important social institutions and organizations can be converted by powerful elite groups to serve certain interests such as maintaining political power and its trappings:

[T]he elite is not simply those who have the most; they could not have the most if not for their positions in the great institutions. For such institutions are the necessary bases of power, of wealth and of prestige and at the same time, the chief means of exercising power, of acquiring wealth, and cashing in the higher claims for prestige (Mills 1956/2000: 9).

The Nigerian experience seems to offer various examples of institutional interventions by influential political actors who capitalize, say, on changing circumstances and extant institutional resources, to access and extend office power in exclusion of other aspirants. The next section looks at the meaning of elite circulation and how social background and network devices facilitate exclusive access to political executive offices.

### 2.3 Political Elite Circulation and the Nigerian Dimension

Generally, the circulation of the elite in political systems is determined by a process through which 'new' persons or groups from broader society are admitted into governmental offices for dealing with policy issues (Pa-



reto 1939, Zuckerman 1977, see also Dahl 1971, 1989, 1999, 2003, Lane 1995). Though this concept lacks clues about the social basis of elite ascent to the national executive power structure, it is useful for identifying the type and extent of renewals, at least, nominally, of elite members who ascend to political offices from the larger society.

Keller (1963/1991) qualified 'elite circulation' as 'the process whereby individuals or groups gain access to or lose their hold on elite positions' (p. 228). Translated to political executive office-holding, elite circulation in a particular power sphere implies access to and exit from political offices through processes of recruitment. In open political systems, elite circulation occurs through the institutionalization of recruitment policies that spell out entrance conditions while making office tenure last no longer than desirable. Elite circulation in political offices thus encompasses not just changes in the recruitment pattern of the elite to high government positions but also the political and institutional tenure of office positions. Keller's approach to elite circulation reflects the pluralist view of political office renewal through periodic free and fair elections. Political power renewal is then assumed to be associated with political stability through the renewal of persons and ideas that mostly support the political system.

However, the current study is interested in those factors that impede the expected elite circulation in political executive offices of Nigeria. Despite emphasizing biological and physical limits to political elite continuity in power, the classic elitists were pessimistic about the prospects of significant changes in elite composition in an open political system, especially those based on democratic regimes (Mosca 1939, Pareto 1968/1991, Michels 1991). Pareto (1968) pointed out the functional distance between the elite and non-elite and discredited the notion of collective changes in the pattern of the elite in government positions. Elite circulation was considered only on an individual and selective basis rather than through social participation (*ibid.*). Initially, Mosca (1939) had asserted the possibility of collective circulation due to each group's need to maintain social status. He visualized elite circulation in political power through a sub-elite type linked directly to society. Sub-elite nodes were said to serve not only for socialization with the non-elite below but also for recruiting persons from lower strata of society (*ibid.*).

Sub-elite types in Nigeria are embodied by 'godfather' financial patrons that operate informally, though sometimes under the tacit approval

of top executive government agents (Albert 2006). Sub-elite roles can also be played by traditional rulers who maintain direct links with both grassroots and top-level executive elite circles, especially within the national executive (Vaughan 1995, 2005). The important issue about sub-elite roles in Nigeria is how their interests are channelled through exchange relations into the national network that informally constrains elite circulation in political executive offices. For the purpose of this study, the sub-elites embody, for example, the influential traditional rulers who cannot seek or hold formal political office but who can use their informal position to link office-seeking with office-holding in the central government. Because their power is mostly informal, sub-elites are referred to as 'informal elites' in this study. 'Sub-elites' do not circulate directly in political executive office, but as holders of informal powers they are instrumental to the operatives of the wider network based on their direct contact with grassroots members. Because traditional elites act under varied contexts as agents with the capacity to influence elite circulation, to support government actions and to legitimate continuity in formal political executive office, they are part of the non-governing elite as defined by Pareto (1968).

Thus, informal elites are both participants and contact nodes in the complex network that cuts across different social boundaries. They serve to link likeminded actors and to recruit persons who avoid changes in circumstances to inherit political offices at the national executive level. Recalling the classic elitist reasoning, Prewitt and Stone (1973) described the retention of advantages by the ruling class as follows:

The ruling class then retains its advantages despite the advances of democratic thinking. The rulers continue to siphon off an undue amount of the social surplus for personal benefits; they continue to make laws which reflect their own world views and which serve their special interests; and they continue to control the selection of the persons who will inherit their positions (Prewitt and Stone 1973: 24).

In other words, informal elites constitute an influential contact group through which control over the selection of the inheritors of formal political power and roles may be exercised in the Nigerian case. The gloomiest of the classic elite thinkers was Michels, who introduced the 'iron law of oligarchy' precept as an inevitable factor militating against social change through elite recirculation (Michels 1968: 342–356). But does the iron law of oligarchy hold for Nigeria?

The image of vested interests, social irresponsibility and birthright determining political office-holding is likely an accurate reflection of the historical and current Nigerian experience. Similarly, the generational changes that liberal pluralists believe to renew elite circulation (Inglehart and Abrahamson 1995) may not apply if office experiences, patronage and corruption are deployed to support office longevity, as the case of Nigeria suggests. The prevalence of symbolic elite practices (rent-seeking, patronage, corruption, political persecution and 'godfather' politics) weakens the real essence (power and role renewals) of elite circulation in political executive offices. Such practices can imply 'power reproduction' described by Chabal (1992/1994) as 'power transmission within the same ruling elite from one generation to the next' in ways that undermine 'formal constitutional rules' for shifting power from 'one set of rulers to any other potential set of rulers' (p. 248).

Pareto (1968) denounced the timeless and degenerative nature of political elite power when succeeding elites derive from the same corrupt background characterized by unaccountable behaviour. In other words, the 'lack of elite circulation' that qualifies 'insufficiency of change' in the power structure (Szelenyi and Szelenyi 1995: 616) can be traced to flawed structural changes and vested interests that support political office longevity and social aloofness. In the Nigerian case, elite continuity in political executive power and roles is quite likely derived from the proliferation of inept institutions which offer little scope for the social changes expected, e.g. effective guarantees of rights to freedom and equality. If a lack of the expected social circulation is empirically verified, the characteristic composition of the political executive elite of Nigeria can be seen as accommodating a political class whose members depend on state resources for survival rather than on strategic public actions that match with societal demands and support.

On balance, the idea that the power structure requires transformation through circulation of a qualitatively more representative elite (fresh blood with workable ideas and functional institutions) than through quantitative circulation (repeated appearances under weak institutions) is optimistically highlighted by the critical elitists Hunter (1953), Mills (1956/2000) and Domhoff and Dye (1987). Moreover, Michels' writings are not all products of pessimism. Lipset suggests in his introduction to Michels' *Political Parties* that each time oligarchic obstacles are uncovered through research, democracy gains firmer ground (Lipset 1968: 15–

39, see also Michels 1968: 364–371). The cumulative lesson for Nigeria is that belief in the pluralistic order of elite circulation in key political offices can be translated into reality if the forces, mostly linked to oligarchic disposition, that inhibit its realization are neutralized to workable levels.

## 2.4 Delimiting the Nigerian Elite Network

### 2.4.1 The Traditional Institutional Elite

Historically, traditional authority structures enjoyed elite privileges and prestige while exercising a measure of authority over their respective subjects (Vaughan 1995 and 2005, see also Chazan 1986, Coleman 1994). Privileged status confers power by permitting the elite access to valued things denied to most members of society. Mills (1956/2000) shows that status symbols or ‘prestige’ (...) ‘buttresses power, turning it into authority, and protecting it from social challenge’ (p. 89). As traditional rulers were deprived of their colonially endowed authority during decolonization (Sklar 1963, Crowder 1970, Mandani 2005), the emergent and succeeding post-colonial elites gradually assumed chieftaincy titles aimed at reinforcing their informal and formal powers (Vaughan 2005, Adjaiye and Mishawa 2006).

Firstly, a direct link is likely to exist between the extrication of the colonially endowed traditional authority, access to chieftaincy titles by the post-colonial elite and the dynamics assumed by the elite in ascension to and retention of political executive offices. The roles of power-brokers and network arrangers that traditional rulers informally assumed (or were bestowed) in the post-colony can be said to reinforce the network objectives of the political class (Vaughan 1995, 2005). In addition, from the so-christened ‘Kaduna Mafia’ of the 1980s, which is believed to be a political executive power and role allotting network (Forrest 1993: 56–57, Osaghae 1998: 25), to the dynamics of ‘godfather’ politics since the 1990s (Albert 2005: 79–105), traditional identities (ethnicity, regional origin and religious affiliations) represent a major platform for engendering political executive appointments and patronage exchanges through networks.

Secondly, the hierarchic structure of ethno-regional and religious affiliations in Nigeria seems to promote a pecking order of traditional elite leadership that supports the wider elite network as it converges at the

national level of executive government. True to social network formations, the Nigerian elite network for sustaining political executive power is not leaderless. Networks require adaptive orientations towards shared goals that are often provided by consistent leadership. Unity of purpose is crucial in elite alliances (Burton and Higley 1998). Hence, network leaders function to ensure the coherence and objectivity of their membership. The dilution of the intra-elite power tussles that often plague leadership successions at the elite level of politics in Nigeria (see Mahmudat 2010), requires the mediatory powers of regional leadership. The northern region, Dudley (1982) suggested, is where power has resided since colonial rule.

Apart from perpetuating 'narrow interests', traditional rulers of northern Nigeria seem to be associated with political 'alliances' and indications of special ethno-regional affiliates for 'appointments' to 'leading' political executive offices (Vaughan 2005: 125, see also Suberu 1997: 401–425). Elite appointments might thus be linked to elite selectivity rather than competitiveness and inclusiveness if similar individuals or groups with vested interests appear regularly in political executive offices over time and space. An outcome of selective elite appointments could be a prevalence of ascription and power inequalities that inhibit the achievement of the liberal-pluralist ideal of cross-cutting social inclusion based on education and competition.

Religion also plays a role in fostering traditional rulers' participation in the network that sustains political executive power-holding. Laitan (1982) observed that the fervent discussion over the inclusion of Sharia in Nigeria's 1979 constitution indicates northern Muslims' indisposition towards a secular state. More relevant to the current study, the attempt to politicize religion in Nigeria by including Sharia codes in the national constitution has not appeared to promote political responsibility, particularly in terms of the elite-masses relationship. As one analyst suggested, there seems to be a disconnection between the rigid applications of Sharia principles to Muslim commoners (locally known as *talakawa*) for maintaining mass acquiescence, and the permissive attitudes of the rich and powerful political elite towards the socially repudiated corruption (Paden 2008). Religious cohesion and ethno-regional solidity thus contribute to reinforce northern political leadership and interest in the national network that supports continuity in political executive offices.

Traditional institutions in post-colonial Nigeria affect the circulation, composition and character of the political executive elite in other respects as well through their participation in elite networks. Age and gender relations tend to be linked to the patriarchal system which has endured through changes in political regimes and size of government revenue. Elite theorists identify ageing, invalidity and death as functions of time that either separately or jointly constrains political office-holding (Mosca 1939, Pareto 1968, Keller 1963/1991). In particular, the trio is generally expected to control office-holding through natural restrictions on life-long office tenures. Time is a physically and mentally limiting factor to office-holding, 'diminishing the influence on the political ability to continue in office' (Biennen and de Walle 1989: 19–43). That is, the passage of time impedes the physical and mental ability of a political executive to continue indefinitely in office. However, and based on the neo-patrimonial model, time in office also provides opportunities for exchanges between patrons (state agents) and clients (selected society members) seeking state contracts and political appointments (Bratton and de Walle 1997). Such exchanges seem to occur mostly at the presidential and ministerial level of office-holding, where decisive executive power (in terms of policy supervision and resource distribution) resides.

As the patriarchal system of Nigeria leans heavily on such traditional authority as that which inspired Weber's patrimonial model, ageing in office-holding has advantages as well for the neo-patrimonial elite leader. Such leaders capitalize on their office experience to strengthen selective support through patronage distribution. Similarly, the patriarchal system of Nigeria *inter alia* seems to pay only 'glossy' (lip-service) attention to women's participation in politics. Consequently, women's voice is likely to remain tied to men's power and all of the problems of representation associated with political practices in Nigeria. The use of first lady figures and elitist acclaimed positions in the presidency (i.e. embodied by the president and vice president) can also be viewed as linked to the control of the direct participation of women in political processes through projects patronized by the presidency and controlled by the first lady's office.

On balance, traditional institutions in Nigeria represent certain politically valued identities such as ethnicity, region and religion. These identities are constructed (Smith 2008) and harnessed by the political class. In other words, they are transformed into political support for those who

seek and hold political executive office. The traditional rulers of Nigeria are part of a political class that backs the political executive office-holders. Traditional authorities naturally legitimate the patriarchal system through which the power structure of age and gender operates, to the chagrin of the youth and women participants in political processes. The traditional rulers are a contact group whose activities straddle the political class, the political executive and the Nigerian masses. Despite their formal ineligibility for elective and appointive political offices, traditional rulers exercise considerable influence over political attitudes and behaviours. Following classic elite theory, the elite are either governing or non-governing with the latter divided amongst those who do and those who do not influence the former (see Mosca 1939, Pareto 1968/1991). Thus, the traditional rulers of Nigeria are amongst the influential non-governing elite.

#### **2.4.2 The Socio-Cultural Elite**

Education and profession are socio-cultural resources harnessed by the political class to create the elite network of Nigeria. They serve mainly for the bureaucratic organization of political power. Since Weber (1968) spoke of the combined persistence of social class and status symbols in less industrialized societies – in contrast to the Marxist linear view of political power based on economic resources – political power rationalization has taken various shapes and been associated with varied outcomes in specific contexts. Mills' *Power Elite* provides a clearer view of bureaucratic conversions based on Weber's insight about the advance of the bureaucracy in industrial societies. Weber postulated as follows:

Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge. (...). But in addition to this, bureaucratic organizations, or the holders of power who make use of them, have the tendency to increase their power still further by the knowledge growing out of experience in the service. For they acquire through the conduct of office a special knowledge of facts and have available a store of documentary material available to them (Weber 1968: 225).

In other words, the bureaucratization of political power is significantly connected to the expansion of the latter, as well as with the sustenance of power over time and its use as an instrument of mass domination.

According to Mills (1956/2000), the bureaucracies of today's states, economic corporations and military establishments are enlarged and serve as means of power never before equalled in human history. Though Mills focused on the triumvirate elite structure in industrialized societies, the likely lesson for Nigeria is that holders of executive power deploy bureaucratic power to rationalize their objectives by concentrating and centralizing authority despite regime changes. Michels (1968/1991) believed the elite capacity to rationalize political power and roles was derived from possession of 'superior knowledge' which affords elite leaders 'an almost insurmountable advantage over members who try to change policies' (p. 16). The consequence, or what Michels calls 'the price of increased bureaucracy' is 'concentration of power at the top and the lessening of influence by rank and file members' (ibid.).

Following liberal thinking, education supposedly enhances elite socialization and the formation of consistent attitudes towards open political systems. However, longer and extended schooling mostly obtained abroad (especially in Western countries) offers not only skills but also a common socializing ground for members of the elite who may be eligible to access political executive offices. Bassey (2009) links 'western education' and 'higher education' inter alia to 'cultural elite status in Africa' including Nigeria. According to Bassey (ibid.: 31), the 'advent of colonial rule and Christian missionary activities' often initiated political changes. In post-colonial Nigeria, a fundamental aspect of the elite network is the systematic conversion of formal education through bureaucratic rationality to stabilize the selective circulation of individuals or groups in political executive offices. Thus, it could be suggested that while formal education enhanced the discontinuity of colonial rule, it paradoxically has reinforced the continuity of the elite in political executive power and authority in the post-colonial period.

### 2.4.3 The Economic Elite

The economic elite are generally expected to exercise powerful and dynamic roles in industrialized and industrializing societies. Nonetheless, caution is called for in overestimating the strategic importance of the economic elite. According to Keller (1963/1991), 'the existence of an all-powerful economic ruling class is no longer valid (p. 83). This position is also held by Mills (1956/2000), who rejected the idea that 'the political apparatus is merely an extension of the corporate world or that it has



been taken over by the representatives of the corporate rich' as postulated by Marxists (p. 170). The reason for the shift away from a superior role for economic power is not just the tendency of industrializing societies towards heterogeneity. The shift hinges on Weber's (1968) assertion that the distribution of honour in a society does not solely depend on economic power but also and perhaps more importantly on status symbols.

This implies the possibility that informal power can permeate both economic and political institutions for the furtherance of self-interest. Indeed, informally based network interactions between the economic and political elites have received analytical and critical attention, especially regarding manipulation of political institutions by the elite. Acemoglu and Robinson (2008) alluded to the use of de facto power, derived from the collusions of the political elite with economic powers, e.g. through corruption and patronage, to offset de jure power of democratic institutions even when institutional rights of liberty are amply granted. Despite structural changes aimed at providing political and civil liberties, the political elite may collude with the economic elite to maintain or further stifle economic institutions (*ibid.*). Acemoglu and Robinson (*ibid.*) state their claim in unambiguous terms:

A change in political institutions that modifies the distribution of de jure power need not lead to a change in equilibrium economic institutions if it is associated with offsetting change in the distribution of de facto political power (e.g. in the form of bribery, the capture of political parties, or use of paramilitaries (p. 268).

It is important to add that corruption, personalization of access to political offices and coercion is inimical to accountability. Hence, accountability as a democratic process is derailed under corrupt and coercive elite leaders. In Nigeria, network-based interactions are probably used as a platform for diverting answerability away from its formal axis, which is the people's preference. According to Jenkins (2007), this diversion implies a shift of answerability from de jure accountability to de facto accountability, which enjoins public office-holders to respond to interests outside those formally recognized in the constitution (*ibid.*). Therefore, disclosing the collusion of elite power with economic interests through corruption and patronage can provide additional insight into the direction of the political executive elite responsibility in terms of the social

group(s) to which the political executive responds through time and space.

#### 2.4.4 The Military Elite

Military participation in politics is an important institutional component of the quintuple Nigerian political elite alliance that controls the federal government. The contradiction between the usual role of the military as territorial guards and its sudden transformation into a ‘vanguard’ of political power, as in Nigeria, provides a useful historical and analytical guide for this study. Heywood spoke of the atypical role of the military in civilian government considered as “(...) guarantors of domestic order and interest group” rather than “alternative to civilian rule within the executive machinery” (Heywood 2002: 379–384). This liberal discourse is perhaps more applicable elsewhere than in Nigeria. In the United States, where Mills (1956/2000) focused his research about the power elite, direct participation of the military in politics is proscribed. But the contrary seems likely in Nigeria. That is, the military is not only actively engaged in Nigerian politics, but it can be assumed to act as a source of continuity in political executive power and positions.

The transformation of the role of the military in Nigeria paradoxically implies its centrality as a network node, either as a powerful initiator of continuity and office longevity or as a reinforcing agent of ‘power reproduction’ over time and space. Military political actors in Nigeria seem to share a similar traditional and socio-cultural background with the traditional rulers and bureaucrats in a way that is likely to translate into an interlocking of power and roles. ‘Interlocking’ in critical elite analysis implies an interchange of positions before or during office-holding, i.e. amongst people of ‘similar origins’ who permanently ‘maintain a network of informal connections’ (Mills 1956/2000: 11–12, see also Dye 1978, Kurtz II 1987). In Nigeria, interlocking appears to play a crucial role in the accumulation and retention of political power and positions, especially within the national executive government. It is thus relevant for understanding elite attitudes towards power-holding.

Both military and civilian elites seem to accumulate influential, parallel or convergent social roles – a military or civilian elite individual who holds chieftaincy titles also shares in executive offices that permit, following a Nigerian observer, the ‘authoritative allocation of state re-

sources' (Omodia 2009: 36). In that context, regime changes can provide a milieu not only for analysing the composition and character of the political elite according to regime and office standards but also for observing the type of elite (military or civilian) that tends to circulate in executive offices as political regimes and resources change over time. In particular, a regime change to military rule usually implies inclusion (not necessarily inclusiveness in terms of a realistic social interest representation) of more military personnel than civilian politicians in supervisory roles (i.e. those political executive offices that are charged with policy control). However, civilian politicians are needed in an attempt to bridge the social gaps that a closed military style of governance may engender.

The argument that civilian politicians are co-opted to bolster military politics rather than to enhance social participation and development makes sense for the Nigerian case. Because authoritarian political systems and actors are aversive to opposition (Dudley 1982), contrary to liberal systems, the admission of civilian politicians is probably a façade aimed at legitimating social control rather than promoting social participation. Hence, the fusionist (military-civilian blend) manifestation of elite composition that the Nigerian polity suggests since colonial rule and over regime types can be said to project an important elitist pact for fostering special interests while at the same time maintaining mass acquiescence.

#### **2.4.5 The Political Elite**

The political elite occupy the apex of the elite hierarchy. This is not simply due to their capacity to form combinations with other elite types (Keller 1963/1991) in the political power structure, but also because of their role as initiators and supervisors of policies with pervasive social outcomes (Lane 1997). The fact that the political elite stratum integrates various segments has special implications for power structuring, based on functional differentiation. Liberal thinking holds that the political elite power structure should reflect a variety of skills (e.g. legal, entrepreneurial, bureaucratic) and permit participation and 'effective opposition to coercion' (Hannan and Carrol 1981: 20). The political elite, therefore, constitute a basis for analysing the characteristics of the core political executive elite, as political executive elites are all political elites though not all political elites are political executives.

To understand elite circulation in executive positions requires insights into the elite's social origin and network linkages. If liberal postulations are accepted about the tendency of open political regimes towards power dispersal and elite responsibility, the political elite configuration will be expected to produce elite competition and social inclusiveness across different professional and social class backgrounds (Dahl 1971, Diamond et al. 1988). Competition and inclusiveness are thus expected to operate under the organization and channelling of social interests through political parties and leaderships. Przeworski (1991) associates the selection of candidates for political offices under the 'political liberty' precept with 'the free choice of leaders by citizens in an open election contested by political parties from all shades of life' (p. 11).

Political parties are therefore an important political institution for organizing political power and channelling public interests. This study argues that political institutions, such as political parties, may be weakened by special elite interests in the Nigerian polity. Political parties are subjected to the same state control as the major national economic resources. Political parties are being transformed into what Michels (1968) calls 'fighting parties' (pp. 78–79). These latter use quasi-military patterns of tactical procedures to dominate the opponent so as to curtail the democratic spirit found in its 'primitive and genuine form' (ibid.) for advancing the people's interests.

The current study considers the core political executive elite of Nigeria as emerging from different social backgrounds. However, its derivation from various social backgrounds does not automatically imply an extensive and deep sense of social representation and responsibility. It does mean that the political elite can transform unexpectedly upon ascending to political executive power by appropriating state resources and denying accountability to the very foundation of political power found in open systems – the people. Instead of a political executive elite composition that is answerable to the people (from whom political power supposedly emanates), answerability by the former reposes on a political class that depends on state resources for its survival.

To understand the parasitic character of a political class that has ascended to political power and depends on state resources for survival, an analytical reference can be made to an agorist view:

By the 'political class', it is meant those who draw their livelihood not from the Market but from the State. The political class is the parasitic class that acquires its livelihood via the 'political means' – through 'confiscation, taxation, and other forms of coercion'. Their victims are the rest of us – the productive class – those who make their living through peaceful and honest means of any sort, such as a worker or an entrepreneur (Sprangler 2006: online).

Yet, the idea of a parasitic political class is not the reserve of agorists. Diamond (1993a) too referred to a political class that is dependent on state resources. This contribution on the nature of the political class contrasts with the Marxist outlook on inequality as derived from economic factors. Instead of the usual direct link to state power through a dominant economic class, state resources stand clear as the ultimate source of political power and elite control over society. In certain contexts such as Nigeria social stratification or social differences or simply social inequality is not necessarily the product of differences in the direct ownership of productive resources, i.e. in the private realm. Rather, inequality can be seen as the outcome of the centralized control exercised by the elite minority over state resources and institutions – political, economic and social. As Sprangler (2006) concluded, Marxists 'misidentified' the oppressor class as economic instead of political, that is, the 'political class' (online).

## **2.5 Summary of Theory and Analytical Framework**

The theoretical discussions so far have shown the variety and unique strengths of elite theories and their application in the Nigerian context. Marxist and liberal theories polarize about elite composition and character in political offices. However, little applicability to Nigeria is found in either the Marxist assumption of economic class determinism of power concentration or the liberal idea of power dispersal based on an autonomous social and neutral state background. As argued here, the circulation, composition and character of the Nigerian core political executive elite derive from their common social background and shared special interests, harnessed to informal networks and supported by the political class usurpers of state resources.

This study's analysis draws from the critical elite theories, which provide far-reaching insight based on a set of ideas that associates the circu-

lation, composition and character of the elite to their social background and intents towards political offices. The current research thus examines the common social background and networks through which a power elite group operates and persists in hierarchic elite positions. Critical elite theorists describe the conversion of office positions into tools for securing the special interests of the elite. The basic contention is that common social background permits the intermingling of elite persons, group coherence and the use of large and important social institutions to achieve special interests.

Yet, unlike the triumvirate elite composition of the power elite model, in Nigeria the activities of many different elite groups (socio-cultural, traditional, military, economic and political) are assumed to be linked to the operation of informal (flex) social networks, political parties and state institutions. The likely outcome is convergence in decisive social positions, such as political executive offices, of similar individuals with shared interests. By acting in defence of certain interests through state resources, elite individuals assume the role of political actors. But they use their familiar social background and their peculiar networks to ensure continuity in political offices. The securing of self-interests also implies the selective sharing of typical attitudes such as patronage exchanges, corruption, ethnic favouritism and 'godfather' politics, which contribute to retard the political system.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> In the first two decades of post-colonial experiences in Nigeria, Marxist scholars tried to link the nation's recrudescing social crises with economic factors. The original version of Nnoli's (1978) book used Marxist theory to link social conflict with unequal distribution of economic resources. Yet, in the 1995 re-edition, the Marxist orientation had disappeared. Also, Madunagu (1982) lamented the weak social roots of Marxism as it failed to stir radical changes in Nigeria. Omodia (2010) was even more critical of the invalidity of Marxist theories.

# 3

## Methodological Considerations

### 3.1 Data Sources

Archival sources and written records supply the major data for this study. Written sources offer certain advantages over other strategies, like the use of nominee lists (reputation approach) and participant roles in policy processes (decisional approach). Johnson and Reynolds (2006) justify the use of ‘written records’ by political scientists ‘when the political phenomena that interest them cannot be measured through personal interviews, with questionnaires or by direct observation’ (p. 206). This certainly applies to this study’s examination of the occupancy history of Nigerians in high political offices, as nationals began to assume executive functions there after the decolonization period (1951–1960), though at first under the tutelage of British colonial rule and rulers. At least three other reasons justify this study’s use of written sources as well.

Firstly, this study spans over five decades. During such an extended timeframe relevant political events and key participants become less visible and accessible to the present generation. This weakens the relevance of interviews, as illness, memory lapses and death militate against verbal data sources. This is particularly true for information regarding elite reputation, which calls on both the physical and moral capacities of those who hold valid information about reputable persons and are willing to share this in probing interviews.

Secondly, this study is not uniquely concerned with policy decisions, their outcomes and impacts across society. Rather, it deals mainly with the circulation and character of the policy supervisory elite that has ascended to key political executive offices from a particular social background. It would be much more difficult to learn who participated in specific policy decisions than to ascertain who occupied policymaking

positions with pervasive social outcomes and which, at the national executive level, contributed to shape the political regime. This shortfall is particularly evident in deeply troubled societies such as Nigeria, with its institutional flux and flaws. Moreover, records about decision-making participants may not be as reliable as lists of prime ministers, presidents, vice presidents, ministers and junta members traced to their different backgrounds, interests and support in everyday Nigerian politics. Hence, the official list of political decision makers provides the departure point for this study's various steps towards identifying and classifying the different background information required for the analysis of elite circulation, composition and character at the political executive level.

Thirdly, research about political elite circulation, composition and character in multicultural and weakly institutionalized societies would likely be less productive if interviews were employed to tease out the main information. Arslan (2006) explained that elites are usually considered 'unwilling and elusive, weary about betraying mutual trust, breaking the seal or implicating self' (pp. 2–5). It then follows that interviews and observations that date back to the decolonization period would be practically impossible to realize.

Over the post-colonial period in Nigeria, record keeping has undergone continual changes in terms of its organized form for consistent consultation. However, the technical limitations of record keeping experienced in Nigeria do not imply the total absence of organized records that serve the purpose of this study. Running records such as yearbooks and who's who compilations are considered useful for tracing 'the origin and relationships among people in various positions of power and influence and to contrast different types of elite groups' (Johnson and Reynolds 2005: 217). Running records exist under the aegis of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information, and are traceable to various national archives, national libraries and some of the country's oldest university libraries located in different regions and cities. Access to available records is made difficult but not impossible by inadequate handling and incompleteness (i.e. unavailability and disparate locations). This required the researcher to travel between distant regions to fill pertinent data gaps.

The choice to use running records as the major source of data for this study stems from its particular advantages over episodic records. Episodic record sources entail dispersed and unorganized documents, par-



ticularly by private individuals. Johnson and Reynold (2005) describe these sources as deriving from the 'more causal, personal and accidental manner' of 'diaries, memoirs, manuscripts, correspondence, autobiographies and biographical sketches and other biographical materials' that serve the researcher of 'particular subject matter' (pp. 207–208). Because of the impromptu nature of episodic records they could not offer the large samples and numerical measures required for the analyses in this study.

The data compilations and classifications used here derive from various editions of the Nigerian Yearbook and Who's Who in Nigeria. These sources gave rise to a sample comprising 1,782 Nigerian elite members who at different periods since 1951 ascended to political executive offices such as that of prime minister, president, minister and junta members. Nonetheless, episodic record sources, especially those in the qualitative form of quotations from autobiographies and biographies, were referred to where possible and convenient to reinforce data from the running records in the course of the analysis. Data secured through episodic accounts require more time and cost to classify than the relatively more structured running records. That is, time and cost disadvantages were less in running records derived from ongoing and systematic record keeping such as the yearbooks and who's who, which constitute the major sources of data for this study.

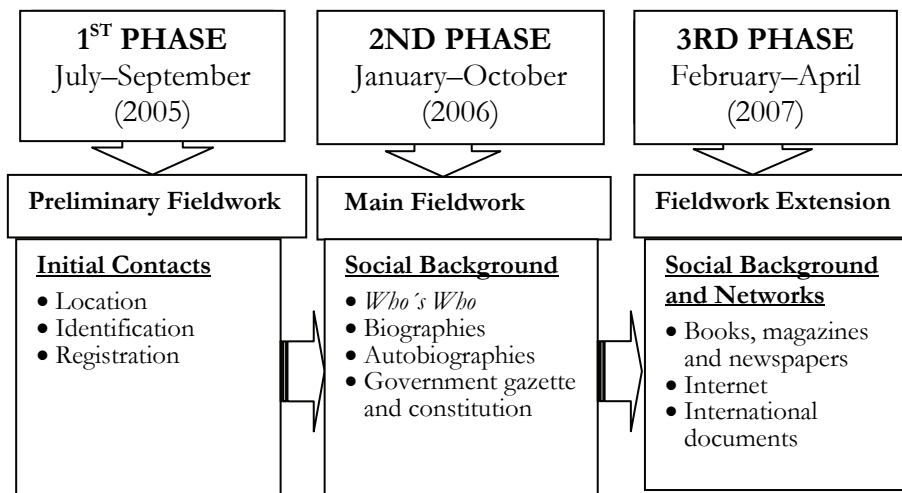
### **3.2 Data Collection**

Six political executive offices at the national government level guided the listing of names and the collection of data. They are the first Nigerian (1) prime minister and (2) governor general as head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces (3) presidents that also answer to the title of head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, (4) vice presidents, (5) ministers and (6) junta members. These individuals or groups form the unit of analysis and the central focus of data collection. In all, 1,782 office positions and occupancies were identified and listed according to their yearly membership in the core political executive elite from 1951 to 2007. Data collection involved two phases as shown in Figure 3.1. The first phase involved the preliminary fieldwork accomplished in two months (from mid-July through September 2005). During this first

phase, important contacts were established with knowledgeable persons and informants about data locations and accessibility.

The location of national archives in Nigeria follows the regional patterns established after decolonization. As a result, the first phase served to locate and access national archives, older university libraries, record-keeping foundations and government organizations in the various regions of the country. Extra-institutional contacts were established with retired public servants such as professors, academic registrars and military officers as reliable informants about the location of relevant public records. Similarly, federal government institutions and agencies, such as the presidency and directorate for archives and national libraries linked to the Federal Ministry of Information were earmarked as sources of data collection. Figure 3.1 shows the complete circle of data collection as it unfolded. Valuable information was retrieved from newspapers, the Internet and books about the social background and interests shared by the Nigerian political executive elite.

**Figure 3.1**  
*Stages of Data Collection*



Most important at the initial stage (July through September 2005) and in the process of data collection were visits to academic institutions such

as Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria, north), Abuja University (Abuja, federal capital), the University of Ibadan (Ibadan, west) and the University of Lagos (Lagos, west coast). Preliminary visits were made in late July and August 2005 to national libraries and national archives located in the cities of Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna and Ibadan. In Kaduna and on a visit to the national archives situated at Ahmadu Bello Way, information was obtained about the valuable library and archival services offered by Arewa House in the same city. Arewa House is a foundation house with a fairly organized library and archive established from the records of the defunct (colonial) northern region government. Its record keeping extends to the post-colonial period in such a way as to confer running record status to the organization. Similarly, visits were made to publishing companies where the researcher held consultations with newspaper and magazine editors, some of whom compile Who's Who in Nigeria. For the names and list of sources see the reference section.

The first phase also afforded opportunities to conduct informal interviews with professors about how and why fellow intellectuals were being recruited into ministerial positions. During the visits to the political science departments at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (north) in August 2005 and the University of Ibadan (south-west) in early September 2005, informal (unregistered) conversations with professors were quite revealing. The working conditions of intellectuals at Nigerian universities were described as devoid of real incentives. This deficiency was considered a major motivation for lecturers and professors to pursue financial gain outside of educational institutions and in ways that perhaps contribute to institutional weaknesses in Nigeria.

In the second phase of the fieldwork, these institutions served the objective of data collection, as they are major centres of learning and repositories of documentation in Nigeria. The second phase of the fieldwork which lasted eight months (January to October 2006) focused on the consolidation and initial registration and classification of data. The knowledge previously gained about data locations facilitated effective collection of biographical and social background data between and within the key regions. The new federal capital at Abuja became central for reviving contacts and collecting additional data, while the nearby city of Kaduna offered accessible facilities for compilations and systematic registration. Apart from consolidating data collection and registration, this second phase was revealing about the feasibilities of the initial plan.

### 3.3 Data Classification

The theoretical framework of this study calls for data classification beyond the limited scope of class hierarchies to analyse the composite nature of the Nigerian political executive elite. Scholarly critique of class stratification considers the class analysis of social phenomena based on national-level sample surveys of occupational background as inadequate. Crompton (1998) referred to studies about social stratification oriented towards national programmes in industrial societies as emphasizing 'order rather than conflict' (p. 77). The national programme studies were quoted as lacking 'the relational schemes' aimed at capturing 'the underlying divisions and conflicts associated with class in capitalist industrial societies' (ibid.). In Nigeria, there have been attempts to apply data based on class relationships to political elite behaviour in liberal-oriented research (Smythe and Smythe 1963) and Marxist-oriented studies (Nnoli 1978, Imoagene 1989). However, they fall short of encompassing the wider social structure (class and status symbols), e.g. including professional class and ethnic categories. The latter in particular might expose the constructed nature of ethnicity by the political elite who seek or hold key political offices.

A circumscribed class analysis is difficult because social phenomena in complex social contexts (such as Nigeria) can hardly be attributed to a single causal link derived from educational or occupational data. Such a narrow data base (i.e. restricted to a particular source of information) invariably leads to anticipated outcomes instead of realistic conclusions. While occupational data can show the distribution of political offices based on schooling or training experiences and achievement criteria, such distributions omit status attributes originating from ethnic, religious and regional origins – though these likely demonstrate the infusion and sometimes profusion (i.e. excesses) of criteria of ascription in office-holding. Studies that deliberately or systematically omit status symbols such as ethnic identity will be deprived of valuable information about commonalities in elite background, interest clusters and feedback.

Unlike liberal conventions, critical viewpoints from new institutionalism reinforce 'political structure and institutions' as subject to manipulation by socio-cultural aspects (ethnicity, language and culture) and social class factors (professional or material distribution) in ways that make 'class differences translate into political differences with great reliability

across time and culture' (March and Olson 1984: 734–735). For example, political institutions especially political parties and their respective leadership orientations can be observed in Nigeria as permeated by patronage exchanges and corrupt practices with destabilizing effects on the political system as a whole. According to Stepan (2001), 'institutional stability and legitimacy can depend less on group interactive autonomy based on occupational interests than situations of social cleavage or crisis where despite cross-pressures, some pressures assume greater salience in terms of the stakes involved than others' (p. 45).<sup>1</sup>

The multiethnic and socially differentiated Nigerian context can provide data about the circulation, composition and character of key political executive leaders based on ethno-regional origin, religion, formal education, profession and political party affiliation. The combined effect of such data distribution could reveal social similarities and differences that indicate the varied levels and origins of the social pressures exercised on the power structure, especially at the political executive level. Similarly, data about political appointments prior to and after general elections might validate the relationship between patronage dealings and elite attitudes towards continuity in political executive offices.

Students of neo-patrimonialism view patronage exchanges as operating primarily through informal institutions such as the presidency, patron-client relations (clientelism) and state resource distribution (Jackson and Roseberg 1994, Bratton and de Walle 1997). A causal relationship can thus be established between, on the one hand, rent-seeking, patronage distribution and corruption and, on the other hand, selection and nomination of similar individuals or groups to occupy elite political executive positions to defend the interests of the political class. That is, a common socio-cultural, economic, military, economic and political background and interests could secure continuity and the organizational capacity to encapsulate mass tension over different periods and in various circumstances.

The data taxonomy adopted in this study both includes and extends beyond social class characteristics motivated by division of labour (into categories such as lawyers, business persons, intellectuals, military personnel and politicians). That is, data classification integrates aspects of 'age, sex, ethnicity, religion, region, skills, strength and the like' that reflect the complex, heterogeneous background of the elite considered as hailing from 'the broader social basis linked to the community' (Keller

1963/1991: 33). However, the inclusive and dispersed nature of data neither implies the coexistence of a heterogeneous distribution of elite individuals nor the coherent representation of social demands. Only through empirical observation can the actual power structure of the political executive elite be more fully ascertained.

To provide a more consistent analysis, data classification follows the periodic changes in political regime after decolonization. Table 3.1 shows the regime changes with the code label used for analysis purposes. The changes start from the decolonization period (numerical order '0') and extend to up to Obasanjo's government (1999–2007). The inclusion of the data for the decolonization period is meant only to reveal any lines of elite continuity in political executive offices through the Nigerian independence period into the post-colonial period. This means that the major focus of the empirical analysis is the post-colonial period, when Nigerians assumed *de jure* and *de facto* positions in directing their own political affairs.

**Table 3.1**  
*Longitudinal Design and Time Order of Regimes*

Numerical Order	Nominal Values	Periodic Ordering	Code Label
0	Decolonization	1951-1960	0DC: 1951-1960
1	First Civilian Regime	1960-1966	1CR: 1960-1966
2	First Military Regime	1966-1979	1MR: 1966-1979
3	Second Civilian Regime	1979-1983	2CR: 1979-1983
4	Second Military Regime	1984-1999	2MR: 1984-1999
5	Third Civilian Regime	1999-2007	3CR: 1999-2007

Source: Author's (2010) compilation based on Nigeria's post-colonial history

### 3.4 Data Application

Acclaimed elite researchers such as Mills (1956) and Domhoff (1986) applied data obtained from running records in the United States to analyse the relationship between elite background and participation in im-

portant political processes at the national level of government. In addition to social background data, running records constitute an original source for listing institutionalized office positions and measuring the year-to-year occupancies of political executive offices in post-colonial Nigeria.

Disaggregated social background data from running records can provide information about elite circulation in political executive offices in terms of the proportion of the different elite groups that participate in political executive offices under different regime contexts. Worthy of note, especially for the Nigerian case, is that certain individuals may repeatedly occupy elite political executive offices over time. That is, repeated names appear over various years and across periods in which offices may have been recreated or renamed after 1951. Consequently, data about nominal and positional recurrences in political offices can highlight linkages within a complex range of temporally and spatially overlapping roles since decolonization in Nigeria.

Data from running records can be operationalized to ascertain the extent of political executive membership clustering, for example, through ministerial appointments at critical political points that precede and succeed major elections. Specific data clustering around elections can indicate a concentrated resort to patronage exchanges to boost the executive government's legitimacy and continuity based on the support of similar elite individuals and shared interests. In other words, if ministerial appointments (particularly second-order cabinet positions) are found to be enlarged at the proximity of elections, the trading of political influence through the distribution of rewards (patronage exchanges) can be inferred as the product of the political elite's need to bolster selective social support for continuity in executive government offices. Moreover, running records provide information about differences and similarities in actors' political executive backgrounds through time and space.

This study gainfully applies data sourced from the running records of international agencies including Transparency International (TI), Freedom House (FH) and Afrobarometer, posted on their respective Internet sites. Data prepared by TI centre around their Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) across different countries, including Nigeria. TI data sources are useful at least as sensors ('feelers') of the attitudes of the Nigerian political elite towards office-holding. FH rates different countries (Nigeria included) on political rights and liberties. Like the CPI, the indicators

of political rights and liberties as provided by FH stem from a rich running record of the alternating changes from democratic to authoritarian regimes along the post-colonial period.

Thus, the FH data show differences and similarities between governance attitudes (e.g. towards open competition and social inclusiveness) and governance regimes (such as institutionalized rights to freedom and equality). Data sourced from FH can therefore convey the significance of political executive elite circulation, composition and character, particularly in response to political regime change and shifts in economic resources in Nigeria. Hence, the FH data will be useful for estimating the extent to which changes in political regime and economic resources provide a fertile context for elite circulation within the national executive government.

Afrobarometer data provide information about social responses to political governance shifts and changes in the political system. Indicators of such social responses are instrumental for this study to gauge the attitudes of political executive elite office-holders towards political participation.

### 3.5 Data Analysis: Social Background and Networking

This study's analysis of data is based mainly on social background and network approaches. Longitudinal analysis is used to consider possible social relationships by observing relevant historical and dynamic facts and by looking back through various periods and events for plausible causal factors (Vaus 2007). Social background data can provide insight into the characteristic appearances and attitudes of the power elite who ascend to political executive offices over time and space. Various studies and analysts have shown that historically recorded and traceable social origins are meaningfully associated with the types of political elite and their manifest character (or attitudes) towards political power and roles (Marvick 1961, Parry 1969, Quandt 1969, Rustow 1970, Van Donge and Liviga 1987, Olagunju et al. 1993, Ake 1995, Basse 1999, 2009, Akinrinade 2006). In the Nigerian case, social background data permits a retrospective analysis of various categories of data (names, portfolios, age, sex, profession, and communal and party affiliations) that show a pattern of elite participation in political executive offices.



The study of elite manifestation in political executive offices based on social origin has several advantages. Analyses of social origin are more useful than institutional approaches. The latter approaches offices or positions as stable patterns of expectations (structured roles in the form of rights and obligations) that limit the interactions between public officeholders and society members (Dahl 1995). If political institutions are chosen as unique sources of information and they are observed as historically unstable and fragile (as the Nigerian case suggests), elite analysts unequivocally believe that they may not provide reliable information about elite character and circulation in political executive offices (Rustow 1970, Olagunju et al. 1993).

Instead of looking into volatile institutions, better units of analyses are individuals and groups as they relate with one another through structural changes (Rustow 1970). In many contexts, social crises in the form of 'political implosion', 'revolution', 'regime breakdown' or 'war' lead to elite transformation and stable institutions (Dogan and Higley 1998: 3–28). However, the suggested absence in Nigeria of causal links between context changes and elite attitudes makes institutional changes in this country a less adequate basis of analysis than social background to understand the composite character of political executives.

However, this study's repositioning of the focus on individuals and groups does not preclude the analytical recourse to institutions (formal and informal) as possible resources for elite ascent to and retention of political power. In both military and civilian regimes, informal power can be institutionalized in ways that substitute for formal precepts with greater visibility and predictability. That is, informal power can be harnessed through formal-institutional powers such as the 'Federal Character' principle and patronage power, both of which have largely been incorporated into and exercised by the presidency. Following the constitution of 1979, more informally institutionalized powers were granted to the chief political executive, e.g. to appoint and dismiss federal ministers based on ethno-regional characteristics.

The Federal Character principle mandates distribution of political executive power and roles based on an adapted version of democratic equality which some refer to as 'consociational democracy' (Lijphart 1968/1975, Bolte 2005). Based on the same 1979 constitution, the prerogatives of the presidential institutions were revised to inter alia concede patronage powers to the president or head of state, who could use

them extensively or intensively. In all cases, the current study can expose the full social relevance of the conceded powers only by exploring their real outcomes.

Also, social background analysis can shed greater light on elite leadership attitudes, which could deepen understanding of the operatives of the political system (Edinger and Searing 1967). Firstly, political executive leaders' social background and recruitment patterns (e.g. via political parties, personal contacts or use of force) enable inferences to be made about the political system's homogeneity, its dominant values and elite-elite and elite-masses interactions (Norman 1975, Edinger and Searing 1967, Van Donge 1986). Secondly, elite background data can provide a basis for linking political behaviour with manifest and latent political attitudes derived from social and motivational patterns such as group solidarity and preferences (Olagunju et al. 1993, Lewis 2008). These linkages are believed to be the socialization experiences by which leaders are inducted into political processes at particular (pre-adult and adult) stages of life (Edinger and Searing 1967, Searing 1969, Sears and Nicholas 1997, Bassey 2009). For instance, generational gaps, membership of the major ethnic groups, professional categories and armed forces that derive from common schooling experiences or in-service training schemes can be the entry points to long tenures in political office.

Accumulated wealth and ethnic background can also reinforce the reproduction or recycling of particular categories of elite. Sometimes, these conditions act from the outside of incumbency leverage, but they ultimately impinge on the democratic system (Chazan 1993, Biennen and de Walle 1999, Chabal and Daloz 1999, Akinrinade 2006).<sup>2</sup> This means that the representative nature of the core political elite – those with authority to make decisions whose validity and outcome are expected to transcend private interests – can be more vividly portrayed by exploring differences and convergences of social background and political preferences.

The social network approach aims to deepen the analysis of the circulation, composition and character of political executives. Data about social background reveal the different origins of the political executive elite. However, social background data is insufficient for analysing the interactive mechanisms (networks) that activate and secure the cohesiveness and support of the political class for the power elite. When activated, social background may imply not only the origin and types (military, business, bureaucratic, technocratic and political) of the elite occupants

of political executive offices, but also the social sources of interactions such as networks. The methodological thrust entails the use of data distribution and analysis (in terms of inclusion and exclusion) to show patterns of interactions, overlaps between different elite categories and points of divergence at which one might be excluded from participating in political executive processes. Network analysis can thus provide information about the characteristic composition, connections and communication points that inform elite activities through time and space.

Social network analysis goes beyond the identification of nodes that can represent persons, groups, ideas, events, organizations and institutions that if interlinked and activated through communication produce socially influential information (Moore et al. 2002, Serrat 2009). As Moore et al. (2002) reiterated from various sources of elite studies, 'Research on elites has demonstrated the importance of informal communication networks as key mechanisms joining elites in diverse positions', especially in 'organizations' (p. 728). Dogan and Higley (1998) departed from the analysis of informal background relations and a taxonomy of 'cabinet stability/instability' to show 'elite networks' as producing varied traits, such as ministerial rotations through political systems with stable and unstable governments (p. 11).

'[C]oincidences of interests' among various intercepting elite nodes (Wedel 2009: 20), i.e. beyond the triumvirate power elite, can thus be revealing. They may provide insight not only into power configurations (different elite participation) but also into recurrences (repeated elite participation in government) over time. The specific objective is to discover the elite type and prevailing conditions that affect the political system. Network analysis can reveal the organizations and interests that characterize network activities and relationships through different periods and geographic spaces. The implications can be documented beyond the understanding possible through social background analysis, which merely shows associations between institutional positions and supposed social constituencies of political office-holders. Through network analysis, social background acquires deeper social meaning about the direction of elite representation or 'representativeness' through the interactive time and space of a specific set of political office-holders.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stakes here reflect the interests that drive social group demands or pressures involving different levels of risk bearing and deployment of power resources

<sup>2</sup> In a recent collection of essays about power legacies in Africa, various authors sought to demonstrate the power antecedents and connections of former presidents, especially those that served in the armed forces before ascendance to political offices.

# 4

## Nigerian Political Systems and Phases since Independence

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines structural changes in the Nigerian polity in the form of the various shifts in the political system and changes in economic resources in the post-colonial period. The account aims to identify the trajectories and transformations in constitutional and institutional rules for accessing and occupying political offices and for managing the polity. The chapter furthermore examines the direct role played by the Nigerian leadership in shaping the changes. Hence, it clarifies and contributes to support the study's argument about structural changes without productive institutional development. That is, instead of the institutional strengthening that was supposed to accompany structural changes, Nigeria witnessed a proliferation of political institutions and socially inept governance regimes. Three questions steer the chapter: (1) How have the rules and opportunities guiding the political game changed since colonial rule? (2) Have significant shifts in economic resources affected government makeup and the style of political management? (3) Have changes in the rules of the political game and the available resources been meaningful for sustaining an open political system?

### 4.2 Brief Retrospect from Colonial Rule

Colonial rule in Nigeria became fully established in 1914 when Britain amalgamated the northern and southern protectorates. Colonialism as a political system and set of ideas was based on various constitutions, the efficacy of which diminished as their internal and external sources of legitimacy became eroded while ceding the way to a limited political opening. A sequence of events triggered this historic movement: the two global conflicts (1914–1919 and 1939–1945), decolonization (1946–

1960) and various political and social forces playing distinct though inter-linked roles. The British colonial administrators initiated constitutional changes openly aimed at consolidating and liberating the colonial territory of Nigeria. Historically, at least *de jure*, amalgamation produced the modern state of Nigeria. In practice, however, social integration into a nation-state remained thorny even as post-colonial rule emerged and took shape (Chabal 1992/1994) from 1960 onwards.

The nature of the various constitutions that led to political independence has been dealt with extensively elsewhere (see Mackintosh 1966, Ekeh 1975, Dudley 1982, Graf 1988, Kirk-Greene 1997, Falola et al. 1991/2003, Tamuno 1998/2003). For the purpose of this study, a cursory retrospect will suffice. On 23 October 1913, Lord Lugard was the first warlord to introduce and deploy the dual mandate system to enforce compliance with the initially muted idea of a united Nigeria (Nicholson 1966, Falola et al. 1991/2003).<sup>1</sup> By 1914, amalgamation was fully consolidated. Lugard strategically enforced a unitary system of government. Though he left office in 1922, the government so established operated until 1946, when the Richardson Constitution introduced federalism based on three regions: North, East and West (the tri-regional power blocs). The incipient changes that led to decolonization have been described as 'administrative rather than constitutional instruments' (Kirk-Greene 1997: 31–33). For example, the embryonic Nigerian Council in Order of November 1913 paid lukewarm attention to the elections and inclusion of Nigerians in the political system.

The 1922 Clifford Constitution similarly lacked the relevant social forces of integration, and so it did not significantly alter the colonial pattern of power-holding. The constitution merely introduced four elected Nigerians into the legislative council. A greater majority (twenty-six) of the forty-five components were British officials, while nineteen Nigerians comprised the unofficial bracket. Of this latter composition, fifteen members were handpicked mainly from among traders and traditional rulers to represent British commercial interests. The most relevant political development of the inter-war period (1919–1939) was the first unofficial inclusion of two Nigerians in the Colonial Executive Council in 1942 (Mackintosh 1966).<sup>2</sup> Despite its inexpressive political nature, the inclusion provided the first opportunity for Nigerians to really engage in political learning processes.

The events before 1946 and the active social forces behind them can be viewed as strategically placed beyond colonial constitutional motivations. That is, the social forces observed derived from the broader African historic past in all of its diversity. First, and contrary to the weakening of the pre-existent African states that is often portrayed by analysts, the 'pre-colonial social entities possessed specific features defined by ecological, historical, economic, cultural and symbolic factors' that survived over time (Chazan 1986: 148). As far back as the 1920s and the 1940s African and Nigerian leaders were already being nominated and elected into legislative and executive councils. The historic context offers insight into the role played by the evolving, punctuated and eventually 'transformed' African socio-economic and political systems. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, the changing nature of trade relations between Africans, the Arab world and Europe occupied the central stage of international relations.

The most visible pre-colonial social forces to emerge were traditional rulers and traders. They were instrumental in frustrating or legitimating contacts with outsiders, particularly Europeans, during the initial years of commerce in forest and agricultural products (1472–1562) and in the evolving periods of slave trade (1562–1830) and legitimate trade in assorted goods (1830–1900) (Falola et al. 1991/2003). Falola et al. (ibid.) recount that tribal chiefs, kings and emirs were lured (mostly with gifts), bribed, co-opted or coerced into making commercial and cultural treaties, joining the new elite bandwagon of change and providing support for what seemed to be an intractable alien thrust. Hardy traders from the declining structures of Africa's vast empires acted as royal agents to kings and later as intermediaries or allies to the external agents, eventually yielding ground to these agents.<sup>3</sup>

When the British government revoked the charter (on 1 January 1900) of a major British trading company in Nigeria, The Royal Niger Trading Company, a shift in social structure and relationships occurred that was to have profound impact on the fortunes of the colonial political system. An indigenous educated elite emerged either from the expansionary missionary schools and colonially sponsored institutions or through self-propelled initiatives mostly abroad. An inextricable link then developed between trade and education, with the latter considered a key instrument for promoting structural changes. Referring to David Kimble

and James Coleman's earlier works, Post (1970) asserts that the proceeds from 'trade or agriculture' were pivotal in financing schooling (p. 36).

Economic surpluses contributed to enhance education and strengthen the local elite structure. Apart from the consolidating merchant class, highly skilled professional groups such as doctors, lawyers, journalists and engineers began to emerge, idealize and construct change (Obi 2004). Hence, the argument that has been sustained over time is that, outside of its initial low-key and restricted spread, colonial education sowed the seed for a differentiated elite-masses relationship and antagonistic view of external domination. Elite forerunners not only pressed colonial rulers for improved political and social positions, they also called for colonial retreat. Moreover, tripartite but confrontational power relations arose between the colonial administrators, the traditional chiefs and the local educated elite including the merchant class (see Kilson 1970, Crowder 1970). The educated elite became more vocal at the vanguard of the national liberation movement. They seized all available means, particularly the revolutionary print media, creating inspiring newspapers and nascent political parties endorsed by the Clifford Constitution, to air their views in favour of political freedom while reproving the use of chiefs for colonial purposes.

**Table 4.1**  
*Constitutional and Transitional Government Composition (1914-1960)*

Constitution	Governor	Year	Freq. * (Yr)	Official Members			Unofficial Members			Grand Total
				Ex-off**	Nom.***	Total	Elect-ed	Nom.	Total	
Lugard	Lugard	1914	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Clifford	Clifford	1922	08	---	---	26	04	15	19	45
Richardson	Richardson	1946	24	13	03	16	04	24	28	44
Macpherson	Macpherson	1951	05	---	---	06	---	---	136	142
Lyttleton	Macpherson	1953	02	03	01	--	--	--	180	184
Independence	Robertson	1957-60	04-07	--	--	--	312	--	--	312

Source: Compiled by the author from various colonial constitutions

\*Yearly Frequency \*\*Ex-Officio Members \*\*\* Nominated Members



However, political socialization seems to have reinforced the capabilities of the nascent elite. Gradually, the emergent Nigerian elite impelled actions towards social mobilization and integration of the social forces that produced new leadership structures and rudimentary pathways for state-building. Table 4.1 presents the timing of constitutional changes between 1914 and 1960. Although little constitutional change occurred before World War II, the far-reaching impacts of the war accelerated the pace of successive constitutional changes towards decolonization. Also, while the British were busy consolidating their conquered territories and later with war campaigns, anti-colonial waves were building up and uniting to overcome colonial domination.

War fortunes added to the emergence of a new elite structure. War veterans returned home to join forces with other elite militants for change. Another sub-elite group emerged among colonial clerks and factory workers. Though they lacked high educational qualifications, their conversance with administrative procedures made them insider-informants and emergent indigenous bureaucrats. The rest of the population formed the masses that, aside from episodic revolts, remained generally acquiescent and subject to manipulation. It was against this backdrop of events – marked by contradictions, agitation, global accords and disaccords – that change by political liberation became feasible.

The period of decolonization (ODC: 1946–1960) had continuing relevance. It not only delimited the nature of the changes to come, but it also provided the social and economic background for future regimes. Between 1920 and the outbreak of World War II, embryonic trade and ethnic unions were formed (Falola et al. 1991/2003: 80–81). At this time, the economic geography and colonial divisions of Nigerian society were already a juxtaposing force vis-à-vis the social stratification that was considered historically important for democratic and capitalist development. The Richardson Constitution of 1946 became the pivot for a bottom-up pattern of representation based on the Native Authority (NA) system and regional councils. Its essence was incorporation of all of the provinces in a central legislative body, meaning inclusion of the Northern provinces in the larger legislative body.

From this point onwards, three regions (North, East and West) became the political axes of a lukewarm federal system with Lagos on the west coast serving as the seat of the National Assembly (Mackintosh 1966). The Richardson Constitution was eventually rejected by the emer-

gent nationalist leaders. No Nigerian stakeholder (not even the budding national elite) was consulted, and discretionary powers continued with the colonial governor general in Lagos. A broad-based protest was organized by the first widely acclaimed political party, founded in 1944, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), and led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe who had just returned from overseas studies. Although the protest reached the heart of the colonial power in London, it did not yield the expected outcome. However, it was a milestone as the first major organized opposition which synergized collective values in the emergent state of Nigeria. So, while the Richardson Constitution was internally discredited, its basic tenets triggered the liberating forces that stirred large-scale mobilization and institutional changes.

The 1951 Macpherson Constitution merely reiterated the past constitutional changes. It endorsed the bicameral legislatures for the North and West and a single chamber for the East with legislative power over certain matters. The central legislature could propose as well as debate, vote and veto all bills subject to the governor's approval. Likewise, a central executive council was made responsible for conducting government affairs through the formulation and supervision of policies. It could, for whatever reason, hold any bill and was presided over by the governor. With this, the early 1950s witnessed the first indigenous formation of the federal executive council (the cabinet) under the supervision of the governor general.

The 1953 Lyttleton Constitution came into force in October 1954. It formally established the 'Nigeria federation of three regions composed of North, East and West' (Blitz 1965: 5). Furthermore, this constitution raised the national representation from 136 to 184 seats and retained the Council of Ministers (which had existed since Macpherson), providing for the appointment of council members from the composite of elected federal members but not without the advice of regional executives. The position of regional governor was also created. Regional governors could appoint the regional premier from the leadership of the political party with the majority of the seats in the Regional Assembly. Advised by the premier, the governor appointed the regional ministers. The constitution finally provided for the 'exclusive' and 'concurrent' lists,<sup>4</sup> decentralized regionalized revenue formula and measures to secure an independent judiciary and civil service.

The London Conferences of 1957, 1958 and 1960 were so decisive that they culminated in the Independence Constitution and political freedom in 1960. However, the issue of minority rights was deferred, despite agitation for boundary adjustments that would widen the political participation of smaller social groups in Nigeria. The Wellinck Commission, set up in 1957, advised on this matter, which was concluded with a constitutional note that such requests could be reconsidered in future where necessary. The interests of these groups were thus literally consigned to a constitutional footnote (Osaghae 1998). In practice, the initial mishandling of the legitimate demands of minority groups undercut their powers and rendered their interests contingent on the tri-regional majority groups.

Certain Nigerian political analysts attribute the lapses in the tri-regional framing of decolonization to the British and Nigerian emergent elite (Oyinbo 1971, Tamuno et al. 1998/2003). The framework is reported as containing the belief that minority interests would be secured through the integrative forces of the 'majority ethnic leadership' under the 'federal structure' (Graf 1988: 38). To some extent, those who conceded independence were short-sighted, and doubts continue to be raised about the strength and honesty of purpose of the British in devolving caretaker powers to the three majority ethnic groups amongst the more than 200 in Nigeria (see Cohen 1972, Joseph 1999).

The majority ethnic groups' leaders actually capitalized on the numeric forces of their ethnic groups to dilute the pressures exercised by the minority ethnic groups while using the strength of their majority to ascend to positions of national power.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, no other analyst depicts this historic passage and enduring legacy as well as Nnoli (1995) who decried the feeble capacities of the monolithic and tripartite forces of change based either on northern might or the majority power trinity of the combined northern, western and eastern regional blocs. It is unimaginable from the inception of decisive constitutional changes that minority interests would not be systematically overruled or marginalized without constitutionally entrenched guarantees.

### 4.3 Post-Colonial Political Regimes

#### 4.3.1 Travails of Parliamentary Democracy (1CR: 1960-1966)

Despite British tutorship, the decolonization constitutions of Nigeria appear to have been broadly set along the liberal state ethos of open competition and inclusiveness guaranteed through rights to freedom and political equality. A bold attempt to do away with the vestiges of the colonial heritage brought the free choice capacity of the pioneer Nigerian leaders into the spotlight. A constitutional reform enacted on 1 October 1963 proscribed certain portions of the independence constitution, replacing them with republican tenets. This change was specifically intended to eliminate the inconsistent and undesired aspects of the British legacy and bring government nearer to the people (Dudley 1982).

The constitution enshrined a mixed presidential-parliamentary system of government. This constitutional reform eliminated the office of the governor general to accommodate the powers and roles of a president.<sup>6</sup> Aside from ceremonial functions, the president was given the power to endorse bills before they become law, and the position's tenure was extended to five years. Also, the prime minister was no longer subject to the whims and caprices of the monarch or governor general and could be removed only with a vote of no confidence by the parliament. The Privy Council hierarchy under Her Majesty was also abolished by the republican constitution.<sup>7</sup>

The constitutional reform of 1963 also eradicated the Judicial Service Commission and conferred the president power to appoint Supreme Court judges but not without the advice of the prime minister. Other revisions included the following: empowerment of the Supreme Court to declare any law unconstitutional if it was found to be inconsistent with constitutional precepts; procedures for creating new states, adjusting boundaries and amending the constitution; institution of revenue allocation formula based on need, national interest and balanced development.

The reforms instituted with the republican constitution offered the best opportunity since colonial rule to test the aptitudes and adaptabilities of the national political leaders. The changes placed emphasis on political power and role restructuring, adaptation of tasks to environmental changes and leadership response capacity. Such capacity was to manifest not only in constitution-making and review exercises, but also in the steadfast guidance of societal development vis-à-vis elite actions.

Initially, the political elite seemed to manage state affairs considerably well, until things began to fall apart.

To fully appreciate the political inertia that followed the post-independence parliamentary democratic constitution with its eventual debacle, it is necessary to recall the normative nature and implications of the federal system as it was (and continues to be) applied in Nigeria. In principle, a major aspect of federalism is the equal representation of the federated regions to enable harmony by disabling dysfunctional political disputes that could arise from sharply skewed power relations or over-ambitious power struggles (Wheare 1963, Amuwo 1998/2003). Critics blame the disruptions in the Nigerian political structure on the unstable grounds on which the foundations of federalism were laid after colonial rule. The extent to which this is true remains a source of debate and analysis to this day (see Amuwo et al. 1998/2003).

Recall that the groundwork for federalism in Nigeria was laid in 1946 by the Richardson Constitution, which created three regions (East, North and West) with Lagos as the confluence centre. By 1954, federalism had been officially inaugurated. Paradoxically, regional structures with large ethnic populations became a major power resource. As more than half of the total population was registered in the North, that region seized a power advantage over the combined East and West.<sup>8</sup> Such power has been variously applied, but not without opposition. Social upheaval and political crises culminated, in the first instance, in the demise of the First Republic.

It has been observed that British decolonization policy devolved political power to the North by institutionalizing regionalism as the basis of power distribution in the National Assembly. Cohen (1972) highlighted the incompatible form of this distribution by referring to the weak association between 'Northern legislative seats in the parliament' and women's disenfranchisement (pp. 246–247). The dynamics of the events spanning the 1946 Richardson Constitution to the fall of the First Republic show the centrifugal tendencies of political power based on the so-called federalism. It also reveals the skewed regional power distribution in favour of the northern power bloc, with its actors infiltrated in the central legislative and executive structure.

Apparently, numeric strength, as depicted in Table 4.2, played a role in the North's outmatching the other federated powers and slanting the balance of power in the central government. Under the Richardson Con-

stitution, the North as a single bloc was endowed with a bicameral system, while the East and West remained unicameral. Also the northern representation to the central government was disproportionately increased in relation to and at the expense of the other regions, both individually and jointly. Table 4.2 clearly shows this disparity. While northern representation rose from 45% in 1946 to 56% in 1960, those of the West and East diminished from 30% to 20%, and 25% to 24%, respectively. The point is that this numerically asymmetric and paradoxical power relation persisted from the very inception of federalism in 1954 without being corrected.

**Table 4.2**  
*Regional Participation at the Central Legislative Assembly (1946-1960)*

Constitution	Year	Official	Cameroon	Lagos	Regional Distribution (t = participation, p = population, millions)								
					North	%(t)	%(p)	West	%(t)	%(p)	East	%(t)	%(p)
Richards	1946	17	03	01	09	45	--	6	30	--	5	25	--
Macph	1951	06	--	--	68	50	--	34	25	--	34	25	--
Lyttleton	1954	01	--	--	92	52	53	42	24	19	42	24	19
Independ	1960	--	--	03	174	56	53	62	20	23	73	23	19

Source: Compiled by author from the 1946, 1951, 1954 and 1960 constitutions and the 1943 and 1952 censuses

The Nigerian polity shows more contradictions, especially regarding the regional distribution and application of political development resources. It is curious, for instance, that the northerners are said to be more backwards in terms of western education than the southerners (East and West), but the region has nonetheless been more politically effective, at least, in articulating its preferences under Nigeria's federalism. Besides the visible population bias, unity, in terms of the capacity to agree without excruciating discrepancies, and, most pertinently, an integrative religious faith and unbroken traditional hierarchy with a particular interest in leadership, are additional sources of northern power and dominance in the larger framework of the Nigerian polity (see Whitetaker, Jr. 1970, see also Dudley 1982). It is no less intriguing that the North has

since colonial rule held on to executive power and role leadership without significant challenge from the southern majority and minority blocs.

Similar strains can be observed in the executive power sphere, particularly through the organization and activities of political parties and their leadership. Starting with the first general elections in 1951, an ethnic voting pattern emerged. Although a multiparty system was introduced at the end of decolonization, both party membership and voting patterns quickly became circumscribed by ethnic, regional and religious alignments. Consequently, the results of the 1959 independence elections merely confirmed the ethnic pattern of vote-casting that had emerged in the first elections. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) won the 1959 elections with 134 seats.

The party (NPC) actually adopted the slogan 'One North, One People' (Dudley 1982). This motto reflected the restricted party membership, being open only to people of northern Nigerian descent. Outside religion, the exclusive membership of the Native Authority (NA) system provided the bulk of the party's formation (Sklar 1963, Dudley 1982). Combined with communal values, an internally consistent political structure provided the basis for homogeneity and hegemony. The period between 1960 and 1966 was marked by decisive processes and outcomes that led to the fall of the First Republic. Unexpected outcomes, however, actually stirred subsequent events. The fierce struggle for political power and dominance at the regional and national government level plus the use of ethnicity and patronage exposed the differences and similarities between political actors based on their typical channels of socialization.

Put differently, access to state power and distribution of resources through patronage exchanges (re)emerged in the post-colonial period to limit power relations. Opposition parties and their leadership were treated with less tolerance than would be expected in a democratic system. Nwabueze (1973) noted the 'systematic act of repression' that was applied to the Action Group (AG) party in the opposition front (p. 154). Indeed, it not only served to demoralize the opposition but also led to large-scale defection, which became known as 'carpet crossing' of AG members to the Northern People's Congress and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) at the federal level. Out of 75 elected members of the AG in 1959 only 13 die-hard (*ibid.*) affiliates remained in 1963, that is, before the ill-fated 1964 elections.

The prime minister eventually withdrew official recognition of opposition with the justification that 'a handful of thirteen members could not be expected to provide an alternative government' (Nwabueze 1973: 154–155, Agi 1986: 19). On 20 July 1963, a motion appeared in parliament to amend the constitution and enable the preventive detention of persons suspected of subversive activities. It took the concerted efforts of the press, the Nigerian Bar Association and opposition parties to reverse the proposal, but the real intent was not stifled as tension between power centralization and decentralization continued (Mackintosh 1966, Nwabueze 1973, Dudley 1982). The wilful suppression of opposition and political engineering towards a monolithic power structure, added to the weakening of the democratically elected government. Hence, the structure of the political system began gradually to move away from a multiparty setup to a one-party system during the First Republic.

The recourse to blackmail, nepotism, patronage, electoral rigging and political hooliganism evidenced the heightened level of intolerance to political opposition. Violent conflicts broke out in different regions between supporters of the various political parties and their leadership. The 1962 western region conflicts and confusions triggered others that led to the wretched 1964 and 1965 elections at both regional and national levels. These two elections held by the regional and federal governments were supposed to produce an uninterrupted change to the second post-colonial mandate of the First Republic. However, they became the kernel of impasse, linked to the loopholes of the colonial institution which the 1963 republican constitutional reform had ironically sought to correct.

The reform eliminated the Privy Council, which the Nigerian elite considered an undesired inheritance from the English monarch, with its governor-general position occupied by an upper political class representative of the British colonialists. Replacement of the governor-general's office with an indigenous president was intended to afford greater leadership autonomy and confidence to Nigerian leadership than obtainable under the previous situation. Broadly speaking, these important institutional changes sought the extension of real sovereignty to the people through an autonomous parliament.

On 15 January 1966, the military intervened in government affairs under the allegation of improbity and irresponsibility of civilian politicians. All hope for consolidating the democratic political system disap-



peared under the various institutional and leadership atrophies that gave rise to military rule.

#### **4.3.2 The Advent of Military Rule (1MR: 1966-1979)**

Nigeria's initial experience with military rule lasted 13 years (1966–1979). It took off with a sternly worded broadcast by the 15 January 1966 coup plotters who denounced the lack of moral integrity of civilian rule in Nigeria and declared its political institutions null and void with immediate effect. Fortune, however, brought General Aguiyi Ironsi to the forefront of political power as the first military head of state after he foiled the 15 January 1966 coup. Through various authoritarian acts he abolished political parties, interest groups and the institution of parliament, as they were perceived able to easily mobilize opposition against the military regime (Dudley 1982). In their place, a military political hierarchy was established under the control of a military junta codenamed the Supreme Military Council (SMC). This appellation was either repeated or varied according to the choice and contextual necessities of subsequent military regimes.

The junta was responsible for all major decisions related to agenda control and policy initiatives. Indeed, it combined the role of the executive and legislative powers, while the bureaucracy and judiciary were subordinated to the whims of the military actors and the governance regime, itself driven by decrees, coercion and manipulations. Another structural characteristic of the military regimes, starting from the earliest one, was the blend of military and civilian personnel. In the case of Ironsi, both military and civilian advisers were integrated into the highest echelon of government.

Perhaps wrong counsel and timing (precipitated actions) plus lack of vision about the intricacy of the unfolding context and insufficient political tact about the right policy measure at the right time led to the abrupt collapse of Aguiyi Ironsi's government through a countercoup organized by another set of young military officers on 29 July 1966. Yet, the structural changes introduced by Ironsi in that short period had lasting significance. He publicly and unilaterally announced, on 24 May 1966, through Unification Decree No 34 of 1966, the creation of a unitary system of government. The unitary design was aimed to transform the 'four regions into mere political units' to be tagged 'provinces' and

establish 'a unified Civil Service Commission' under the ban placed on 'political and tribal organizations' (Graf 1988: 42).

This forceful unification move was perceived, particularly by the northern military elites, as an ethnic plot by southerners, especially those of eastern Igbo origin, to dominate the federal power structure and put Ironsi at the helm of national government affairs (Muhammadu and Haruna 1979). As the power struggle since colonial rule had centred on who accesses state power and controls the distribution of its resources, there was little wonder that the Nigerian elite leaders perceived (wrongly or rightly) the Igbo move as a systematic attempt to exclude the North from federal offices. Ironsi's action, however, left the political development of Nigeria with an enduring paradox. A Nigerian political analyst observed that, though subsequent governments overturned the action towards a unitary system, power centralization became 'the cornerstone of all military government in practice' (Nwaolise 2005: 119). Nwaolise (*ibid.*) stressed that the very 'practices and attitudes', such as the centralization of resource control and the weak autonomy accorded the federal states of Nigeria, were transplanted into federalism with the consequent erosion of its operating principles.

Also, a particular pattern of ascent to political offices by military personnel began to take shape and develop gradually following the first two military coups. The northern military elite hierarchy, dominated by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, launched an attack against the coup plotters of 15 January 1966, mainly of Igbo extraction. The immediate interest appeared more the 'rebalancing [of] Northern power' (Muhammadu and Haruna 1979: 25–30) than overcoming colonial legacies and ethnic power imbalance at the national government level. The group of northern counter-coup plotters emerged as the new power brokers from within the military hierarchy.

The 31-year-old army chief of staff, Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon, was installed as the new head of state and government. Though a northerner, he hailed not from the powerful Hausa-Fulani kingmaking caucus and geopolitical zone but from the minority Middle Belt of the Jos Plateau dominated by the warrior-like Tiv ethnic group. In all, he was accepted by northerners and well liked by fellow officers from the Middle Belt. However, with the summary killings of the Igbos and the sudden elevation of Gowon to head of state, secession loomed within the eastern power bloc. After all negotiations failed be-

tween Gowon as Nigeria's supreme leader and the eastern region's military governor, Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, war broke out between Biafra and Nigeria in 1967.

A notable political aspect of Gowon's administration was the unfulfilled pledge to return Nigeria to democratic rule. Despite the constraints posed by the distractions and management of the internal war, and acting in concert with the Supreme Military Council and state governors, Gowon is remembered as the first military leader to display fervent greed and ostentation amid the revolutionary sale of crude oil (see Joseph 1987, Nwaolise 1995). Oil revenue rose steadily to outstrip and replace agricultural cash crops as the main source of government revenue during the 1970s. His nine-point programme to return Nigeria to civil rule was transformed instead into a political joke as oil sales exceeded expectations, while the economic situation deteriorated under the corrupt military governors who never heeded calls to liberalize the polity.

However, Gowon's government contributed to certain structural changes in the Nigerian polity. The four regional divisions (North, East, West and Mid-West) were elevated to twelve (12) states in 1967, more out of war exigencies than a long-standing popular yearning for local autonomy through boundary adjustments (Nwaolise 1995). Gowon reinstated the Federal Executive Council (FEC), under the so-called 'diarchy' or fusion (see Akinola 2003) of civilian and military personnel appointed to the topmost federal executive portfolios. These commissioners, later designated ministers, were the only aspect that distanced his regime's structure from Ironsi's, which was purely a military outfit. A superstructure of permanent secretaries and political advisers was also created and infused into the political system. The structural role of this mixed pattern of government was effectively to limit the undesired influence of military rule or simply to mask its authoritarian nature to render it less unacceptable to the people.

It is noteworthy that Gowon ran the government for about nine months without the FEC and was only backed if not led by the superstructure of permanent secretaries that advised on practically all political and even military matters (Dudley 1982, Osaghae 1999). But while the contributions of the secretaries structured the regime, they also rendered it monotonous and adverse to change through their incessant and unproductive debates about the nature of the political system. The same superstructure of bureaucratic decision makers, mostly made up of

southern intellectual elite, was reported to have cost Gowon the support of the North, especially that of the region's core cultural groups who believed the influence of the former to be 'antithetical' to northern interests (Dudley 1982: 98). Again, the unfounded fear of ethno-regional dominance re-emerged with negative effects on the solidity of the political system.

A decrepit economy, corruption, a central government incapable of disciplining wayward military governors, loss of faith in the highest executive leader, even by his very 'constituency' (the military), and most relevantly the lack of progress in the move to democracy combined to diminish the regime's legitimacy. On 29 July 1975, General Yakubu Gowon was shut out of office in a bloodless coup while he was on official mission abroad. The army officers who toppled Gowon were mainly of northern origin. They brought in Brigadier (later General) Murtala Ramat Mohammed as the new head of state, government leader and commander in chief of the armed forces of Nigeria. Like Gowon, Murtala hailed from the North.

The new regime adopted Ironsi's structure of the SMC and FEC, which had also been deployed by Gowon, though with certain alterations. Except on invitation, the structure excluded bureaucrats from the decision-making hierarchy, and all military governors were withdrawn from the SMC and integrated into the new Council of States, thereby creating an intermediary power structure between the SMC and FEC. The move was to clear the decision-making process of unnecessary interventions by the bureaucrats, and ostensibly to depoliticize the bureaucracy. Also, the intermediary role of the Council of States was designed to reduce the heavy dependence of the SMC on the bureaucracy, which had grown very powerful during Gowon's administration.

Corrective institutional patterns were also fused into the system to discipline errant public servants, especially those that had been involved in corrupt practices during the past regime. However, the most important step was taken through measures to return Nigeria to civilian rule. A constitution drafting committee was established and charged to prepare a legal framework to return Nigeria to civil rule and promote its consolidation as a united and peaceful nation. Moreover, local governments were reorganized and the number of federated states was increased from 12 to 19 in a bid to ensure grassroots participation in politics. In short, the Mohammed regime moved so swiftly that in the roughly seven months

from the end of July 1975 to 13 February 1976, when he was assassinated in an attempted coup by one Lieutenant Colonel B.S. Dimka, he achieved what his immediate predecessor had been unable to accomplish under 13 years of military rule. However, the ultimate task of effective power transfer to civilian government was left to Muritala's deputy, Colonel (later Major) Olusegun Obasanjo.

Structural changes during the first military regime (1MR: 1966–1979) can be summed up as a disorderly amalgamation of centralization and decentralization. The period initiated the formal removal of regional powers accumulated since colonial rule and the centralization of political power at the federal level of government. This was achieved mostly by military fiat and neutralization of regional autonomies instituted since decolonization. Apart from the centralization of economic resource control in the federal government and parallel actions of decentralization through state creation, the period inaugurated diarchy as a fusionist pattern of government. Although, the participation of bureaucrats varied, the period was marked by their growing influence and confusion with political roles. It therefore became difficult to discern the structurally autonomous role of bureaucrats from the contingent nature of policy-making and supervision.

More challenging however was the extent to which special interests meddled with bureaucratic and political functions. Dibia (2003), seeking to gain some perspective on the military-bureaucrat nexus, concluded that 'the military elite use the public bureaucrat to help the former establish its legitimacy while the latter look after their own personal and institutional interests' (p. 79). In all, the first period of military rule (1MR: 1966–1979) with its variously composed governments deepened, through typical military styles of power wielding (decrees and power personalization), the structural changes instituted since colonial rule without clear impact on the social responsiveness of the political system.

#### **4.3.3 Changes Through the Presidential System (2CR: 1979-1983)**

The perceived weaknesses of the 1963 republican constitution coupled with the subsequent breakdown of the democratically elected government (1966) gave rise to a series of military governments. These ended in 1979 with the introduction of a presidential constitution and government system. It was believed within the elite ranks (Ademolokun 1985) that a

parliamentary system was not appropriate for the African Nigerian context.<sup>9</sup> Traditional patterns of leadership amid the country's complex social structures were said to require the powers of an 'executive president' to harness the diverse groups and interests of Nigerians (Agi 1986: 13–22, Adebayo 1986/2004: 63–72, Dumoye 2003: 41–55).<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) was set up on 18 October 1975. Despite the gruesome leadership tussle that led to the sudden death of the transitional head of government, Brigadier Muritala Mohammed, the CDC eventually submitted its publicly debated report to the successor government leadership on 29 August 1979, after the ban on political activities was lifted in 1978. The constitution came into effect on 1 October 1979, instituting major changes. Unlike under the earlier parliamentary system, the new constitution merged the offices of the head of state, head of government and commander in chief of the armed forces into the presidency. In principle, this meant that the president's authority and that of the subordinate vice president and ministers would stem from direct and popular election by the people.

Apart from the implicit incorporation of popular consent through presidential elections and the explicit infusion of the 'Federal Character' principle in processes of ministerial appointment, the constitution emphasised prior scrutiny and confirmation of ministers by the Senate. The 'Federal Character' principle was a historic political invention. Not only was it entrenched as a political institution in the constitution but beyond its original aim of insuring 'equity' and 'national integration' (Utume 1998/2003: 201–210) it increasingly became a political instrument for accessing positions of power in the public service (Agbodike 1989/2003: 177–190). Moreover, as it was not binding on the president to appoint only party members into the cabinet, it emerged, at least in principle, as a tool for engendering political stability.

Similarly, the president was empowered to appoint the chief justice of the federation limited only by senatorial sanctions. The appointment of other Supreme Court justices was also made the prerogative of the president, though with senatorial approval required and contingent on the advice of the Judicial Service Commission. The 1979 constitution provided for the creation of a new capital at Abuja and allocated ownership and control of the centrally located land to the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). Measures were established in the constitution to de-tribalize and de-regionalize political ideas and practices by expanding the

range of action and control of political parties over national territory and stimulating 'Federal Character'. Senate membership was fixed at five representatives from each state, but the House of Representatives became population based (to shore up ethnic integration).

Moreover, it became obligatory for political parties seeking control over government machinery to locate offices in at least two-thirds of all the states in the federation. Political parties were not allowed to bear emblems (or mottos) with ethnic or tribal reminders or operate by restricting activities to a particular geographical location. Location of head offices in the federal capital was made mandatory for all political parties. Notably, the 1979 constitution bestowed far-reaching executive powers on the president. It clearly stated that such powers 'shall extend to the execution and maintenance of the Constitution, all laws made by the National Assembly and all matters with respect to which the National Assembly has power to make laws' (1979 Federal Constitution).<sup>11</sup> Apart from the faculty to appoint federal ministers and Supreme Court judges, presidential prerogatives included the appointment and removal of chairpersons and members of key federal commissions and councils, like the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and the National Economic Council (NEC), special advisers, directors of government companies and extension of the prerogative to grant mercy to persons convicted of offences even within the military cadre.

The president was also to exercise significant control over public finance through the formulation and execution of the decennial National Development Plan (NDP) coupled with the preparation and public presentation of yearly budgets (1979 Federal Constitution). In practice, Nigeria's first experiment with a presidential system turned out to be an antithesis of the constitutional treatise to guarantee a less personalized pattern of government, or rather a more democratic form of accessing and retaining political power and roles. Ademolokun (1985) was critical of the contradictions contained in the constitution of 1979. He pointed out the constitution's 'fundamental contradictions and conflicts between the provisions of consensus such as Federal Character and competitive features of political and economic institutions and processes in the form of multiparty and mixed economic system' (pp. 19–32).

Political institutions and powers were abused through such antithetical means as ethnic politics, patronage, corruption and diversion of national priorities. About 50 political parties manifested interest in the 1979

elections though only five of these were registered. At the federal level, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) had to manage elections for 95 senatorial districts (five from each of the nineteen federated states) and the 449 constituencies that made up the House of Representatives (see 1979 Federal Constitution).

The National Party of Nigeria, reported as the largest, registered a landslide victory not necessarily due to its size and the concentrated nature of its membership (in political, business and bureaucratic groups) but rather owing to its geographic spread and zoning strategy. Analysts commented that the party had apparently assumed a 'truly national' character (Falola et al. 1991/2003) by exhibiting the cross-cutting type of membership and representation that Nigerians had been yearning for beyond constitutional stipulations and ethnic divides. Moreover, it adopted an informal zoning pattern of candidacy for its topmost political offices. Its presidential candidate was from the North, with a running mate from the East. Its candidate for speaker of the House of Representatives was from the West and that for senatorial president represented the southern minorities of Bendel, Rivers and Cross Rivers. However, the other political parties were unable nationally to make any significant advance.

Despite the preparations of FEDECO, 'irregularities' were observed, such as late arrival of ballot boxes; incomplete or erroneous voters' lists; absence, disappearance or late appearance of polling officers; and electoral rigging with the use of thugs. Some analysts believe that such malpractices were not as serious as in past elections in terms of both prevalence and their impacts on democratic leadership (Falola et al. 1991/2003: 157–170). Ojo (1981) added that the expansion of the federated states from twelve to nineteen, promulgated by the previous military regime in 1976, seemed to have improved the autonomy of the minority groups, most of which now participated in their separate states. Nonetheless, the ethnic voting pattern continued and, as the analyst noted, even increased (*ibid.*: 48). Ultimately, Alhaji Shehu Shagari from the North was made the first executive president of Nigeria under the new democratic governance arrangements.

The NPN-led government presided over by Shagari overstretched both the formal and informal boundaries of the presidential system modelled after the United States of America's democratic constitution. Initially, the informal zoning system and party alliances, coupled with the



formalized 'Federal Character' principle, which drew from the notion of consociational democracy, seems to have worked as expected. Party alliances were similar to but looked more vigorous than those of the First Republic. Informal network strategies appeared to have been necessitated by the lack of majority seats for the victorious NPN in the bicameral legislature. The party coalition that emerged between the victorious NPN and the NPP political parties reinforced intra-party competition throughout Shagari's first 20 months in office.

The coalition later broke down mainly because, like the First Republic, it was based on group convenience and not truly on national interest and character. Williams (1999) observed, '[T]he formal accord with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's NPP gave the Igbo party a share of key offices and promises of favoritism in the allocation of federal projects and in exchange for cooperation' (p. 104). Judging from the lack of solid organization and proposals of the other political parties, which understandably retreated to the opposition, problems sometimes resonated in political bitterness and envy driven by avarice. In the process, altercations and mutual distrust and destruction led to the interruption of the alliance and hindrance of good democratic governance.

Ultimately, political praxis became hinged on convenience rather than institutional coherence. The ruling parties simply extrapolated from constitutional provisions or they enlarged roles to please sectional instead of national interests. Political crafting through alliances, contestation of political offices and decision-making processes involving *inter alia* reform pacts lost their usual dynamics (driving forces) to patronage exchanges and casuistic agreements that were broken at the slightest difficulty. The much-touted Shagari government was transformed into a shadow of the structural arrangements that preceded its inauguration. State structure became bloated under superfluous demands overtly based on ethnic leadership patterns and self-serving interests.

High and mid-level public offices were created to absorb the teaming party supporters and cohorts of the government who pledged to conduct affairs with the fairness reminiscent of the Federal Character and democratic principles. Patronage by selective awards of overestimated public contracts became the basis for garnering support and nurturing the ruling party. The party itself was swiftly transformed into a perverted block of parvenus and dubious aristocrats. Bribery, corruption and burning of public buildings to veil fraudulent acts were all displays of the fervent

greed of elite leaders cut across the various levels of the state machinery.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship with the National Assembly also reflected the greedy outlook of government formation. Assembly debates became awash with bitterness over political, bureaucratic and technocratic distribution of ministerial appointments, which most members considered to be skewed in favour of a particular ethnic group. According to Williams; '[This] controversy paralyzed subsequent proceedings in the National Assembly charged with monitoring the selection of federal appointments and ensuring compliance in resource allocation' (Williams 1999: 104). In all, the state became captured, bloated and too expensive to run.

Nonetheless, the incumbent won the second national elections, and Shagari was returned to the presidency on 1 October 1983, with an overwhelming majority – greater than the 1979 outcome. On 31 December 1983, just three months after Shagari was sworn in for the second mandate, he was removed from office by a bloodless military coup. Worthy of note but often missed by commentators is that Shagari's regime received the highest ratings for freedom and political equality from the Freedom in the World ranking during the period between 1979 and 1983. Perhaps, this ranking reflects more the institutional inventiveness for supporting the political system than the political attitudes and behaviour that actually characterized the Shagari led and NPN controlled so-called democratic government

#### 4.3.4 Intensified Military Dictatorship (ZMR: 1984-1999)

The unilateral interruption of the 1979 Second Republic constitution (by military fiat) opened the way for another succession of military rulers that lasted up to July 1999. With a similar pattern but differing styles of authoritarian rule, various military regimes either promised or engaged in constitutional reforms to re-establish democratic rule. Notable was the short-lived but harsh authoritarian regime of the famous duo of Major General Muhammed Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon (1983–1984). The Buhari-Idiagbon government initiated and implemented the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), consisting of measures to correct perceived deficiencies in the political culture of the Nigerian society.

Social attitudes towards political authority were perceived as permeated by lawlessness, which operated to undermine social stability. A pop-

ular saying in Nigeria that 'in a lawless land all offenses are justified' then became a policy issue for the regime. Stringent measures were adopted under various decrees, and tribunals were set up to try and jail transgressors. However, the rashness inherent in the measures became unacceptable to important segments of society. The suppression of freedom of speech through, e.g. the jailing of foremost members of the Nigerian media alongside other human rights violations, led the public to distrust the real intentions of the government, which broke down in its first year of existence. Despite its shortcomings and from a historical perspective, most Nigerians recognize the short-lived Buhari-Idiagbon government as the one which, after that of Murtala Mohammed (1975), made the most significant and positive impact on the public mood and perception of the timely necessity of military rule.

On 26 August 1985, Buhari's government was overthrown by none other than his own Chief of Army, Major General Ibrahim Babangida, who took on the title of president of the government. Under a blend of political shrewdness, charisma and Machiavellian style (with timely dosages of soft and harsh policy measures) Babangida introduced the IMF loan conditions even after they were rejected through a 'stage managed' opinion poll (Ihonvbere 1998). The issue that lingered through social debate about Babangida's government is not only the way he played into IMF policy exigencies, such as the notorious structural adjustment programme (SAP), but also the ambiguities surrounding his attitudes towards political power and policymaking. Some analysts fault him for mishandling the state fiscal crisis which originated from the early 1980s, thus pre-existing his government (Biersteker and Lewis 1997).<sup>13</sup>

However, it was through political and bureaucratic institutional changes that Babangida's government completely dashed public hopes for true democratic transition under open participation. In aspects related to political and office power restructuring, he was more consistent in planning and organizing the transition process. Babangida set up a political bureau to which he appointed individuals from a wide spectrum of society, whom he described as 'men and women of ideas and experience' (cf Olagunju et al. 1999). His thrust was seemingly to clear the transition pathways of diversionary pebbles. He created two political parties and personally named them the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Congress (NRC).

Babangida wrote the political parties' manifestoes and personally directed politicians to enlist in specific parties. While a lot of public money was being spent building political offices in all the Local Government Area (LGA) headquarters, Babangida's henchmen were busy brutally suppressing political opponents. However, things soon began to derail. Moreover, the fact that Babangida appeared to enjoy instead of denounce these incidents placed serious doubts on his intentions. Many got rich quickly, while drug trafficking and money laundering thrived under the watchful and assenting eyes of the uppermost government leader. So-called political dissidents were thrown into jail and alleged coup plotters were detained without trial, given a summary judgment of life imprisonment or coldly executed.<sup>14</sup>

The government also embarked on bureaucratic reforms whose outcomes ran counter to the expected transition to democracy. There was a politicization of bureaucrats with their transformation into opportunistic and dependent entities rather than engines for consistent change towards democracy. Babangida replaced the 'career permanent secretaries' with the unstable offices of 'directors general' similar to the ministerial pattern, as these officials could easily be manipulated through politically oriented admissions and dismissals (Ademolokun 1997: 364–372). The presidential election was eventually held on 12 June 1993. Its outcome was a forgone conclusion that was followed by an astonishing twist in political fate supervised by the presidency. With an unsigned press release, Babangida annulled a widely acclaimed but now worthless presidential election. On 23 June 1993, Babangida announced his justifications for cancelling the election and promptly established an interim national government. He appointed a personal friend and business tycoon Chief E.A. Shonekan, to manage state affairs while he resigned. Shonekan's government was declared illegal by a Lagos High Court in November 1993. Consequently, the opportunity emerged for General Sanni Abacha, the most senior after Babangida, to take over the helm of government affairs.

Abacha's regime was marked by cumulative revolts, especially in Lagos metropolis, other western states and more broadly in the South including the old mid-western and eastern regions. The supporters of Abiola, who hailed from the West and was believed to have won the 12 June 1993 elections, openly protested against the cancellation of the electoral results. Abacha stepped in with military fury and crushed the rebellion

wherever it emerged. Government machinery, however, was not only set against socially unacceptable conduct, like uprisings, drug trafficking, wharf pilfering and airport touts (as these were seriously damaging the image of Nigeria and held back an influx of international investment), it was also employed against political opposition.

Many freedom fighters and coup plotters were detained by state agents, and most died while in custody. Political parties were proscribed and their leaders were either summarily executed or had to flee the country. One case was the killing of Alfred Rewane, suspected of funding the activities of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) whose members were sympathetic to Abiola. NADECO was formed by a splinter group from the SDP created by Babangida. This development set a clear pattern of pro- and anti-democratic groups in the Nigerian polity. Abacha's relationship with the media, which he perceived as opposed to his government, was not cordial and productive. Indeed, he contained press freedom to the point that many newspaper houses were closed down and journalists were either jailed or publicly flogged for one alleged offence or another.

Abacha appeared prepared to enact any measure and use the state machinery to perpetuate personal interests in office. He held Abiola in jail and imprisoned many notables such as Retired Major General Olusegun Obasanjo and Major General Yar'adua, who eventually died in prison. His regime became the terror of the targeted groups. He executed a renowned civil rights activist and group leader of the Ogoni – Ken Saro Wiwa – despite global protest. Here, a tussle over revenue allocation escalated under the sweeping top-down political control with the outright use of state machinery to silence groups. The Niger Delta crisis remains to this day a symbol of the dysfunctional system based on the political 'scramble' for resources 'achieved through lucky accident' (Edylyne 2001, Douglas et al. 2003).<sup>15</sup>

Abacha set up a constitutional conference whose major outcome, announced on 25 April 1995, was unclear about tenure – indeed, it conferred the dictator the sole right to determine his government's longevity. But eventually, the issue of tenure would depend not on his will but on the course of nature. The most tyrannical and human rights flouting regime of post-colonial Nigeria came to an abrupt end on 8 June 1998, upon the death of its mentor.

On 9 June 1998, General Abdulsalam Abubakar ascended to the highest seat of government as Nigeria's new head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces. The new head was serene and committed to the transition process. If not thoroughly, he earnestly accomplished in roughly one year the task of democratic transformation that his immediate predecessor had selfishly ignored. Initially, he opened all entry points of participation needed to enhance a wider political contest. He granted amnesty to practically all the political detainees and those who voluntarily or involuntarily fled the country to avoid political persecution under the fury of the previous military leaders – these included members of the now defunct NADECO.

Government machinery was then launched against the perpetrators of state terror and those who had used it to accumulate wealth and power under the previous regimes. Many were traced and rounded up, and large sums of money that had been looted from the treasury were recovered. In all, the one-year transition regime officially set the election machinery in motion by replacing the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The five political parties and functional subsidiaries were dissolved; in their place emerged the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All People's Party (APP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Though Abubakar's role was significant to the transition process, unofficial reports allege that he and his cronies did not resist the temptation of plundering the state's treasury themselves (Aderemi 2004/2005). Like the previous militarily arranged transitions, the 'content' rather than 'process' of transition appeared more salient on the agenda. Crucial civil society inputs or advice were not adequately considered in the constitutional negotiations and approval.<sup>16</sup> In the national elections that followed those of the local government and federated states, Retired Major General Olusegun Obasanjo won the presidential contest on the PDP platform. He was sworn in on 29 May 1999 as the second executive president of a democratically elected government in Nigeria.

Despite that post-colonial Nigeria had witnessed important structural changes, the second period of military rule (2MR: 1984–1999) initiated the most extensive structural changes to date, such as the structural adjustment programme that combined economic and political reforms during the most prolonged government of the period, that of Babangida (1985–1993). Before the Babangida government, the military govern-

ment of Buhari-Idiagbon (1984–1985) sought to deepen the economic austerity measures weakly initiated during Shagari's (1979–1983) government. The duo also tried to introduce radical changes in social structure, especially value patterns, through the 'War Against Indiscipline' (WAI), which was supposedly aimed at moving society towards democratic rule. On the whole, the second period of military rule in Nigeria was an anathema to the expected changes in governance regime. Loathsome tyranny, sarcasm and selfishness were styles of rule that Nigerians least expected after the preceding changes and experiences of bad governance.

#### **4.3.5 Back to Democratic Rule (3CR: 1999-Present)**

The 1999 constitution, despite its manifest pluralist tone, became the inheritance of another military regime. Like the constitution of 1979, the relevant provisions of the 1999 document included the separation of powers, federalism, a bill of rights, a multiparty system and a secular state. Under the principle of the separation of powers, Part II, Article 4, Section 1 of the constitution vested legislative powers in the bicameral National Assembly composed of the House of Representatives and Senate. While the latter had 475 elected members based on each state's population, the former had 108 elected members founded on a multiple of three members from each of the 36 states of the federation outside the federal capital of Abuja. Section 4, sub-section 2 of the constitution limited the powers and roles of the National Congress to making laws 'for the peace, order and good government of the Federation or any part thereof with respect to any matter included in the Exclusive Legislative List set out in Part I of the Second Schedule of this Constitution' (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria).

The constitution readopted the presidential system of government. The Federal Executive Council (or cabinet) was to be headed by an executive president and assisted by a vice president with an appointed body of ministers. According to Section 5, sub-section 1a and 1b of the constitution, the executive powers of the federation 'shall be vested in the President and may, subject to the provisions of any law made by the National Assembly, be exercised by him [sic] either directly or through the Vice-President and Ministers of the Government of the Federation or Officers in the Public Service of the Federation'. The roles expressed in the powers of the executive, as clearly stated by the constitution, 'shall extend to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution, all laws

made by the National Assembly and to all matters with respect to which the National Assembly has, for the time being, power to make laws' (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria).

Judicial powers were entrusted to federal high courts and supreme courts. Judges therein were endowed with autonomous powers to review both executive and legislative acts. The appointment of judges by the president was subject to confirmation of the legislatures, which were charged to ensure that any such appointment be in keeping with constitutional provisions. The federal principle remained in the constitutional framework with the three-tier system of government (federal, state and local). The 36 states with 768 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) made up the federation. Although the powers of each lower tier are clearly outlined in the constitution, none of the federated states had its own constitution as usually found in federal systems. However, the constitution did allow for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) charged to register political parties under a multiparty system.

It also provided for a bill of rights which would guarantee a set of civil and political liberties such as the right to life and dignity of the human person; personal liberty; fair hearing; private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of expression and the press; peaceful assembly and association; freedom of movement; freedom from discrimination; and property rights. Certain fundamental objectives and directives were also established, to ensure a set of social, cultural and economic liberties such as the right to education. However, these were not made enforceable like the bill of rights. Ultimately, the constitution expressly disallowed the adoption of any religion as state religion; the formal constitutional position is for a secular state as opposed to a theocratic one.

The 1999 elections were conducted amid expectations that they would be a first major test of the consistency of the preceding constitutional design. They were meant to demonstrate the adaptability of the Nigerian elite after some 40 years of political independence and various trials of democratic elections had ended in disrepute. However, the one-year transition programme and its conduct by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were not without grave pitfalls. Widespread electoral rigging and the active presence of political thugs featured in the unexpected outcomes that were nonetheless officially sanctioned.



The winning party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), had earlier adopted a zoning system that allotted the presidential ticket to a south-wester and vice presidential candidacy to a northerner (Dan-Musa 2004: 67–72). In the end, a retired military officer from the south-west and former head of state during the 1975–1979 military regime, General Olusegun Obasanjo, was elected as the second civilian executive president. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, from the North and one-time officer of the uniformed Customs and Exercise Corps became the vice president.

As was to be expected after the long oppressive and stressful years of authoritarian regimes (1984–1999), the advent of democracy in 1999 exacerbated popular clamour for participation in government processes and outcomes (Ukiwo 2003). However, the expectation that democratic principles would prevail as an alternative to conflict resolution transmuted into violent outbreaks of group protests and responses by government agents. The so-called democratically elected leadership of President Obasanjo reacted with unmatched force against popular agitators.<sup>17</sup> What followed were outright violations of human rights through the deployment of state machinery.

Indeed, the initial crisis of participation that attended the Obasanjo regime was not limited to state-society spheres but also to intra-institutional relationships at the state level. The conflicts between the executive and legislature appeared to take a historic turn. Sectional interests re-emerged as politics were construed to be a matter of resource struggle. The use of ethnic, religious and regional differences for political ends recurred in the post-1999 context. The centrality of the state's role linked to resource allocation has been subject to a long list of formula since colonial rule. Wealth accumulation gained new force while corruption continued unabated. Accountability relapsed and a skewed social distribution of resources propelled organized groups to exert pressure against marginalization. The sources of conflict between the executive and legislative branch were traced mainly to resource allocation tussles (Dunmoye 2003: 47–52).<sup>18</sup>

Institutional conflicts were pitched so high that the president was constantly threatened with impeachment by the legislature. Ironically, the former wittingly turned the scenario against the legislative body, which ended up with its speaker impeached over corrupt practices. In all, Obasanjo's government seems to have chosen combating corruption as the main plank of government policy. An early government act included

the adoption in June 2000 of a bill authorizing an anti-corruption agency to investigate corruption charges against any Nigerian, including the president, the federated state governors and their deputies. The act gave force to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission.

The second mandate of the Third Republic began on 29 October 2003 when Obasanjo was returned to office as executive president, head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces of Nigeria. Nonetheless, the 2003 elections were not spared malpractices. Internal and external observers were unanimous on the unfairness of the competition and the selective nature of inclusion in the political process. Like the 1999 elections and despite the multiparty system adopted, the PDP seemed practically alone in the struggle. Inclusion in political processes at the federal level, and for the presidency in particular, appeared decided at the party primaries. Exclusive political resources, like wealth, media, ethnic numbers and frequently force, were deployed in a fierce struggle to elect candidates whose victory at the polls would be secured more by physical coercion than by open competition and persuasion.

The incumbent's power and use of state machinery reinforced other political resources to guarantee electoral results while boosting party and personal interests. Obasanjo's second mandate was a continuity of the previous. He grappled with political consolidation through economic reforms and intensification of the fight against corruption. Meanwhile, the problem of marginalization continued to plague economic activities in the Niger Delta area<sup>19</sup> through protests and armed movements for the fair distribution of oil resources. The Niger Delta crisis exacerbated as its impacts spilled through the national economy, which was largely dependent on oil production and sales in the international market.

In short, the crisis further weakened government stability through incessant hostilities coupled with destruction and disruption of oil production and sales. Laws were enacted to redistribute resources through establishment of development agencies and percentage increases in statutory allocations to the federated states in the area. Nonetheless, corruption and mismanagement of funds worsened social discontent and aggravated depredatory actions against oil pipelines alongside forceful disruptions and kidnappings of foreign oil workers.

Social insecurity spun out of control, threatening the economy and polity as Obasanjo handed over power to Shehu Musa Yar'Adua. Again,

and, perhaps different from the other occasions, this change in government leadership put the current political system of Nigeria to an elastic test. Like the past elections, the result of the 2007 elections was fervently disputed in court, but once more it was systematically legitimated by the state. Yar'Adua's election was just one in a historic succession of elections subjected to judicial dispute due to open allegations of electoral fraud and violence. But it was nonetheless major in that it kept the fate of the third mandate of the Third Republic hanging precariously in a court for a long and stressful period of judicial processes.

Apart from the electoral imbroglio, Yar'Adua faced a range of allegations about the character of his election, which most believed was owed to the personality of his immediate predecessor. Much of the mass media and observers tagged Yar'Adua's election as premature and void of any particular political agenda. However, many, including the new president, held the view that the Nigerian constitution, especially the electoral system, needed reform.<sup>20</sup> It was in this climate of speculative constitutional changes and Yar'Adua's rapidly developing physical debility that Goodluck Jonathan stepped in the presidential office from the vice presidential position. Subsequent events led to Jonathan's full assumption of presidential power and roles when Yar'Adua died from acute sickness early in 2010.

Apart from structural changes in the patterns of political regimes, the Nigerian polity had experienced very significant shifts in its economic sources and resources. These resulted in exponential increases in the size of government revenue. The growth of oil and gas receipts was described by Ildare and Suberu in the following terms:

Over the years, the Nigerian oil and gas sector has dominated merchandise exports. Oil revenue from exports grew from [US] \$718 million to \$9.4 billion from 1970 to 1978 but declined dramatically from a high of \$25 billion in 1980 to \$4.7 billion in 1986 as a result of the crude oil price collapse. (...) In 2008 total oil export receipts for Nigeria were about \$75 billion, which represents about 98.8 percent of total exports for the year (Ildare and Suberu 2010: 3).

Oil and gas sales provided enormous increases in government revenue and continues to do so up to the present. Moreover, projections of future revenues from oil in Nigeria are huge in absolute and relative terms. Table 4.3 presents data from the Nigerian Authorities and IMF

estimates on recent (2007–2009) and projected (2010–2013) growth in revenue from oil exports as a proportion of total revenue.

**Table 4.3**  
*Share (%) of Oil Revenue in Total Revenue (billions Nigerian naira), 2007–2013*

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total Revenue	2,311	3,029	1,614	2,852	3,739	3,992	4,279
Oil Revenue	1,767	2,539	1,079	2,193	2,951	3,091	3,230
Oil Revenue/ Total Revenue (%)	75.5	83.8	66.8	77.90	80.0	77.4	75.5

*Source:* International Monetary Fund (2011), available at [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/Scr/2011/cr1157.pdf](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/Scr/2011/cr1157.pdf)

The paradox of the significant changes in the economic fortunes and sources of government revenue is that instead of socio-economic development, poverty has worsened in the country. Incidence of poverty in Nigeria has been on the rise, from 43% in 1985, to 49% in 2002, and 54% in 2006.<sup>21</sup> Ironically this increase in the proportion of the poor in the total population occurred amid the oil sale bonanza and accruing government revenue. The pertinent point is that structural changes (significant reforms in the political regime and shifts in economic resources) are generally thought to promote the development of the political system, principally through support to the social groups that make up the polity. Such strengthening of the political system is said to occur when the political system is open to social contestation and participation in decision-making processes and outcomes. However, structural changes, as observed through time, have been more associated with centralization of political power than the decentralization of power in post-colonial Nigeria.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter accounted for the Nigerian political system's various shifts and trajectories in the post-colonial era. Formally, the Nigerian political

system has ranged from parliamentary democracy and presidential democracy to authoritarianism under a constitutionally prescribed federal structure. In practice, the Nigerian polity has been characterized by the creation and recreation by the Nigerian elite of typical forms of governance systems, political institutions and agencies – such as political parties, a presidency, the ‘Federal Character’ principle, electoral commissions and many others. Moreover, informal power, with the politicization of autonomous state agencies, especially the bureaucracy, was documented as having permeated formal constitutional arrangements since decolonization.

The problem is not the presence of informal power or institutions but rather their conversion to personal advantage and the unexpected outcomes of informal activities on the political system. As one political regime analyst noted, ‘procedural rules are contrasted, (...) not to informal ways in which political power is sometimes actually accessed and exercised’ (Munck 1996: 6). Instead, Munck emphasized, procedural rules ‘are counter-posed to outcomes’ (ibid.). This can be interpreted to imply that the responsiveness and responsibility of political actions are fundamental to the maintenance of a governance regime. Even more important, following Verba’s (2003) view, is not the quantity of institutions and agencies (which actually proliferate in the Nigerian polity) but the social quality of interest representation.

In post-colonial Nigeria, the political elite adjusted the Westminster-oriented independence constitution to accommodate both the prime ministerial and presidential offices that rotated between elite persons and groups. Military intercession introduced diarchy, with an executive presidency and the application of ‘Federal Character’ in appointments to ministerial positions. Government sources of revenue have been magnified since the 1970s. While political praxis is observed to have varied significantly, regime instability has remained the outcome and messy hallmark of the polity since colonial rule. Frequent constitutional changes and institutional proliferation have been associated with the political elite’s manoeuvres for political power-holding since political independence in 1960. Military rule unexpectedly lasted longer, and was more painful and pernicious than expected and originally promised.

Political development adepts consider structural changes to be a primary step towards social development. In the Nigerian context, enormous efforts have been expended in instituting structural changes since

the colonial period. Yet, the observed outcome of political regime volatility amid very positive changes in economic resources and size of government revenue transcends mere concern over the political regime's physical durability. Political elite analysts have long recognized the important role of subjective factors, especially based on elite leadership motivations, in shaping unexpected outcomes, particularly in contexts where institutional instability and fragility prevail (Rustow 1970, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

It follows that the relationship between political office-holders' social backgrounds, their interactions and their character could provide an important link for understanding the continuities in political offices that have derailed and weakened socially meaningful institutional changes. Hence, deeper insight into the real composition and attitudes of the political elite towards government authority can be revealed by examining the character of the elite in political executive office, traced to their respective social origins and devices for interacting. In so doing, typical patterns of circulation in political executive offices may be uncovered. Chapter 5 analyses the association between social background and participation of political executive elite in national government offices since colonial rule.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Colonialism is typically justified by the western onus of disseminating civility. Despite the autocratic manner reminiscent of military tactics deployed by Lugard to manage the process, other views persist about its reverse effects on structural changes during colonial rule and beyond. It was not considered as internally efficient as expected or portrayed in literature (*see* Falola et al. 1999/2003). Yet, more cogent than the defects of colonial rule are the effects prompted by post-colonial rules and rulers vis-à-vis the correction of past anomalies.

<sup>2</sup> Before then, and apart from the governor as *de facto* president, the council was exclusively formed by ten ex-officio members of key colonial officers. They were the chief secretary, the lieutenant-governors of the northern and southern protectorates, the administrator for Lagos colony, the commandant of the Nigerian Regiment, the attorney general, the director of medical and sanitary services, the controller of customs, the treasurer, the director of the marine and the secretary for native affairs. Historically, these organs evolved to form the nucleus of the Nigerian post-colonial ministries.

<sup>3</sup> The resurgence of tribal chiefs and traders as recognizable lines of continuity through the colonial and post-colonial periods is scarcely highlighted in conventional literature (Kilson 1970). However, care is needed to highlight the peculiar reconversion of traditional power and roles for furthering the intentions of post-colonial rule and rulers.

<sup>4</sup> The *Exclusive List* includes matters over which the federal government or the federal executive (*i.e.* the Council of Ministers) has jurisdiction over or controls (the army, the police, the postal services, railways, major roads, airports, sea-ports, mining, banks, customs and excise, immigration and foreign affairs. The *Concurrent List* contains matters over which the Federal Parliament and the Regional Legislatures have authority to make laws. They include universities, prisons, labour, drugs and poisons of which federal laws can prevail in case of conflicts. The only aspects in which the regional legislation and executive council have utter leeway are schools, hospitals, forestry, local government with native authorities and native or customary courts.

<sup>5</sup> The different revolts that were crushed by the various majority-dominated federal and regional governments in the minority North and South are exemplary, like the latter's use of population numbers or manipulation of census results for revenue derivation.

<sup>6</sup> Such role attributes are comparable to the French system which accommodates both a president and prime minister with relative autonomies and interdependencies.

<sup>7</sup> The Privy Council is a selected caucus of highly placed members of society to whom cases affecting governments could ultimately be referred to for advice. It had the Queen of England in its headship up to 1963.

<sup>8</sup> The various leadership agents from the North acting at the centre since decolonization through the post-colonial period have never missed the chance offered by numbers and regional cohesion to overstretch the balance in the federal structure.

<sup>9</sup> As Ademolokun (1985) reported, the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) that recommended the presidential system was eventually composed of key elite members of Nigerian society, such as politicians, intellectuals and business people.

<sup>10</sup> Many political analysts and practitioners in the country identified different reasons and produced or portrayed all manner of justifications for the inadequacies and choice of an alternative system.

<sup>11</sup> The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria verging on 'Powers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria', Part I, Ch. II, 5 (1) (b).

<sup>12</sup> These detailed facts and events were mostly taken from major newspapers submitted to content analysis and reports that closely monitor and register events.

<sup>13</sup> The 1980s began with the fiscal crisis (excess demands on available resources) of the state within a neo-liberal order of minimal but efficient state structure taking charge of the international stage. The IMF emerged as an influential player in the direction of national policies. Change was purportedly based on democratization and used the free market to guide political and social relations. To mark the paradigm shift, the state was expected to gradually withdraw (depoliticize) its *dirigiste* activities from the private sector. It was under this scenario, already evident during Shagari's time, that Babaginda came in to concomitantly execute the structural adjustment programme and democratic changes.

<sup>14</sup> Human rights publications at <http://www.hrw.org> detail the abuses committed during Babangida's eight-year rule.

<sup>15</sup> Various accounts about the Niger Delta crisis portray the extent of government and international participation in its sustenance with specific impacts on the polity including volatilities of democratic processes and consolidation.

<sup>16</sup> The comments and viewpoints on the Nigerian Constitution submitted by *The Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue* to the Constitution Debate Coordinating Committee contained advice such as the formation of a transition committee and popular ratification to condition its final product and content.

<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that most grievances and pressures had either an ethnic spread or religious bias. In particular, the latter became a threat to the secular position of the Nigerian state, despite the outright constitutional contradiction. For instance, it was observed that the leadership in some of the federated states with predominantly Muslim populations demanded the introduction of Sharia courts as an alternative to federal courts in their areas of jurisdiction.

<sup>18</sup> The analyst pointed specifically to the acrimony over the termination of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), the allowances for members of the legislature, the alleged interferences of the executive in legislative affairs, the re-enactment or not of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission Act of 2000, and budget allocation.

<sup>19</sup> The Niger Delta area is made up of those federated states from where crude oil as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy and principal source of government revenue is extracted on a daily basis. Certain groups from these states are engaged in fights to have their share of oil revenue. However, the issue is more one of social inclusiveness or simply voice than a specific demand for revenue.



<sup>20</sup> Newspaper reports at the time are marked by such comments and demands for constitutional review and change.

<sup>21</sup> From Apata (2010) based on 2009 surveys conducted by the Federal Office of Statistics (now the National Bureau of Statistics) on poverty and welfare in Nigeria. Note that the 1992 figures show an intermittent drop in poverty to 34%.

# 5

## Social Background and Elite Circulation in Core Political Executive Offices (1951-2007)

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the link between the social background of the political executive elite and their degree of participation in government offices at the national level. It is based on documented and classified data from the period since colonial rule. Four questions guide the investigation: (1) What socio-cultural composition patterns (in terms of age, office tenure, sex, profession and education) can be found in elite circulation in political executive offices under the various political regimes and economic resource fortunes since decolonization? (2) What communal origins (ethnic, religious and regional) characterize the participation of the elite in political executive offices? (3) Is the occupation of political executive offices associated with common social background characteristics? (4) What do the findings imply for the level of circulation and composition of the elite in political executive offices amid the different political regimes and with economic resource changes since colonial rule in Nigeria?

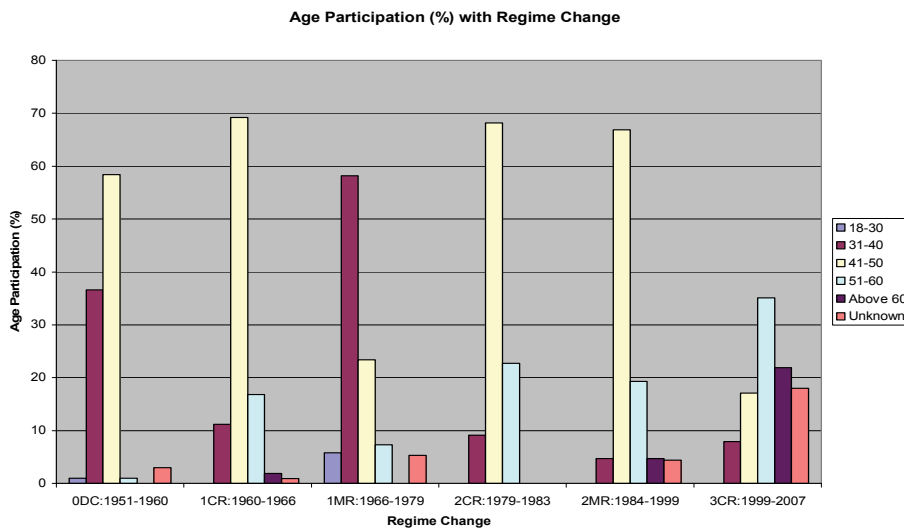
### 5.2 Socio-Cultural Background

#### 5.2.1 Circularity by Age and Office Tenure

Figure 5.1 shows that since the initial formation of the core political executive elite in 1951, circulation in core political executive offices has been increasingly concentrated in the age cohort between 41 and 50 years and older. The one exception was during 1MR: 1967–1979. This first interlude of military intervention broke the age spiral with its 58.2% political executive membership clustered around the more youthful age

range of 31 to 40 years. This means that elite circulation in core political executive offices has largely been the exclusivity of Nigerians above 40 years since decolonization. Elite participation by age cohort in core political executive offices rose steadily and vertically from the second to the third age ranking and into the fourth (above 60 years) as regimes alternated. Figure 5.1 portrays a recurrent age cohort that cumulated in the current Third Republic, at least, from 1999 up to 2007.

**Figure 5.1**  
Age differences (%) of Core Political Executive (1951-2007)



Source: Data collected and classified from various editions of yearbooks and *Who's Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Regime variations do not seem to have influenced the age structure of political office-holders, who increasingly seized opportunities presented in past office experiences to consolidate power. Instead of full withdrawal from political office-holding based on a gradual process of physical debility as predicted by classic elitists, core political executive membership by age cohort evolved from an average range of 31 to 40 years to

between 41 and 50 years and gradually further to 60 years and older. The need to indigenize political executive power during decolonization and the forceful post-independence entrance of young military personnel into the political arena gave the occupancy of core political executive offices a different appearance.

For instance, during the initial period of military rule (1MR: 1966–1979), Nigeria produced Africa's youngest head of state in the person of 33-year-old General Yakubu Gowon (Nwaolise 1995: 21). Apart from the civil war and burgeoning oil revenue, military intervention in politics became the major force driving shifts in the age composition of the elite in post-colonial political offices. It widened the minimum entry point to political executive offices, most especially to military officers. Both before and after the military regimes, political executive elite incumbents sought to retain and consolidate their political power by implicitly resisting its renewal, i.e. the opening of the power structure to other members of the civil society and provision of effective guarantees of political rights and civil liberties. From the tenure perspective, these findings have various implications.

Elite circulation in political executive offices based on age cohort reveals a linear development of the composite character of the power structure based on non-economic factors. Firstly, time-based office tenure tends to confirm the findings of cross-national and cross-sectional studies (Bienen and Walle 1989: 19–34) about the correlation between time in office and political power. Age in relation to office longevity decreases instead of increases the risk of losing political office. Political office-holding and role exercise are significant antecedents of power accumulation. Political executive office occupancy and authority as the right to rule are formally used to amass power through effective control and selective distribution of state resources. Control over state resources in Nigeria has implied consolidation of influence over the other age groups and society at large.

Secondly, and except during the initial phase of military intervention in politics, the pattern of political elite circulation based on office tenure shows a quantitative increase as political regimes and economic resources altered over time. That is, military intervention during Gowon's nine years in government (1966–1975) appears to have implied an increase in the size of the core political executive. Discounting failed coups, the chief executive elite turned over fifteen times (including one recurrent

occupant), which is high for just fifty years of post-colonial history. This means that fifteen individuals have rotated in political executive office as prime minister, president or head of state and government.

It also reveals a particular paradox about the temporal distribution of the topmost and most disputed political power position in Nigeria. Based on the quotient between fifty and fifteen, the average number of times, vis-à-vis the general convention of a four-year tenure, that each Nigerian chief executive leader spent in political offices was less than four years. However, this implies neither shorter office tenures nor voluntary acquittal from political office by the elite office-holder. On the contrary, in practice, many of the chief executives stayed much longer or sought extended office longevity. Actually, the full implication of the distribution is a concentration rather than dispersal of chief executive positions as occupied by the Nigerian elite since colonial rule.

**Table 5.1**  
*Periodic Distribution of Political Executive Office Tenure and First Order Cabinet and Junta Memberships by Regime Type (1951-2007)*

Regime Type	Period	Cumulative Offices	Yearly Average
ODC	1951-1960	96	11
1CR	1960-66	107	18
1MR	1966-79	521	40
2CR	1979-83	132	33
2MR	1984-99	698	46.5
3CR	1999-07	228	32.5
Total		1782	31

**Source:** Classified data from various editions of *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Reading from Table 5.1, independent of regime type, the yearly average circularity of membership in the group of core political executive office-holders under each leader since decolonization up to 2007 has been thirty-one (31) individuals. Up to 2003, no democratic government in the forty-three years since political independence and over two fully recognized republics lasted up to two mandates of four years each. Also,

most interruptions in military or civilian governments were popularly acclaimed, that is, welcomed, at least, initially (Ihonvbere 1998). This is perhaps a sign of the lack of efficacy of political governance in previous civilian governments. Outcomes have been socially insignificant in terms of secured political rights and liberties or, more generally, political development derived from realistic policies of social participation in decision-making processes.

Thirdly, and outside statistical averages, office longevity has been a problem of elite circulation in core political executive offices. From the shortest stay of less than one year, occupants have spent up to nine years in office before being removed by force or nature (death). Cases of voluntary withdrawal after power transfer are very rare, so far thrice (with one recurrent case): during the military (1975–1979) and civilian (1999–2007) governments of Olusegun Obasanjo and under the shortest transitional government of Abdulsalam Abdulahi (1998–1999), following the sudden death of the arch dictator, Sani Abacha (1993–1998). The outcome has been elite reproduction that challenges the generational renewal of political power as advanced by structural change analysts (Inglehart and Abrahamson 1995). Schumpeter's (1919) theoretical proposition – that shifts in economic productivity over time, particularly from manorial to industrial production, dictate changes in the nature of the elite (from aristocratic landowners to industrialists) – does not seem to apply to Nigeria based on political office-power longevity.

Nigeria experienced a lost 'golden age', marked by the revolutionary inflow of oil revenue in the 1970s. Ironically, a context of force characterized by military intervention and a robust government treasury served only to limit elite circulation in the core political executive offices, rather than to usher in real changes in economic productivity. The military usurp of power actually preceded the oil revenue upturn, but lamentably it deepened political power concentration and regime rigidity even beyond authoritarian boundaries. No significant shift occurred in the style of representation in the post-autocracy regime of Nigeria. In other words, it was the quantity not the quality of representation, as emphasized by Verba (2003), that shaped elite circulation in core political executive offices.

Fourthly, the trend of elite participation by age groups across regimes reveals that developmental factors (i.e. maturity, experience and learning) have not reduced the impact of power struggle on elite composition in

post-colonial Nigeria. No election has been held in Nigeria since independence without counter claims of rigging and in most cases attendant violence or intimidation of voters (Suberu 2007). The only election (1993) said to be freely and fairly conducted was unilaterally annulled by the incumbent chief executive of a particular military government (Diamond et al. 1999). Indeed, regime change and leadership succession have often been characterized by violence and weak procedural norms. This latter feature has conferred excessive and abusive powers on incumbents instead of democratically and substantially regulated processes, e.g. effective engagement of public accountability.

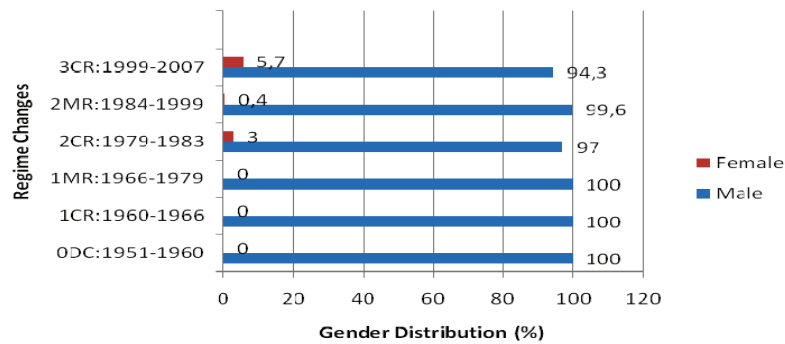
Natural processes of physical and mental debility generally imply a direct relation between lower performance and aging. However, the occupancy of the political executive office in Nigeria is observed to have continually converted time in office to power accumulation and the coercive use of such power to maintain political office-holding. Also, physical and moral coercion are easily deployed to maintain power and exert authority because government revenue has not depended on social tax contributions since colonial rule (i.e. although state power resources are formally constituted, such power is not founded directly on social input in the form of revenue from taxes). The point is that as long as power struggle is driven by selectively shared economic interests rather than interest in public issues (Ihonvbere 1995, Dumoye 2003), elite renewal will continue to be restrained by intrigues for power and access to state resources.

### **5.2.2 Gender Distribution**

Gender participation reveals a peculiar pattern of power relations in political executive offices building from the social background of the Nigerian elite in the post-colonial period. Figure 5.2 shows that women's participation has been very weak, having varied between zero and 5.7% since colonial rule – the 5.7% participation was observed in the most recent civilian regime (i.e. in 1999–2007). Thus, women's voice in political executive decision processes (especially under the democratic regimes), has practically translated to exclusion or marginalization of this very important societal category. Also, no woman was ever part of a military junta's highly esteemed but exclusive circle, as data revealed. Extra fieldwork data show that although the government of Umaru Musa Yar'adua (2007–2008) included seven women among the thirty-nine ministers (about 18% based on a particular leadership or government, mean-

ing that the proportion could decline significantly over the current regime period), it remains a far cry from the United Nation's strong recommendation of 30% participation of women in government.

**Figure 5.2**  
*Gender Distribution and Regime Change*



Source: Data collected and classified by the author from various editions of *yearbooks* and *Who's Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

The issue of women's participation in politics and governance in the Nigerian polity dates back to cultural and administrative biases in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Except in North Nigeria where suffrage was effectively extended to women only in 1979, at the start of the Second Republic (2CR: 1979–1983), women were allowed to exercise their political and civil rights before decolonization (0DC: 1951–1960). However, women's subordinate role in society has hindered their capacity to participate effectively in political activities. Women's dependence on men can be traced back to the patriarchal system that reflects the unequal pattern of social and economic relations which has had deep political repercussions in the Nigerian system.

Observers note too that colonialism neither encouraged nor supported women's liberation. The stratagem and opportunism of colonial education (Mazrui 1978, Woolman 2001, Eno 2004) favoured men candidates for government office and learning opportunities. Eno reiterated



that the latter processes were usually aimed at producing ‘intermediate labor for performing trivial clerical and numerical activities’, increasingly pushing women into ‘domestic services’ (Eno 2004: 34). Even women’s protests during the colonial period are reported to have had a ‘consultative’ rather than ‘participatory’ orientation (ibid.). That is, though women’s interests were not considered as deserving inclusion in political processes, they nonetheless struggled to be consulted in the selection of participants. Neither did structural changes after colonial rule significantly improve women’s voice in political executive office-holding, as power continued to be slanted markedly in favour of men (Figure 5.2).

Despite this adverse historical background, no institutionally established and oriented (public or private) organizations have been proactively engaged in women’s empowerment at the political level. Apart from government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties are perhaps most apposite for championing women’s liberation. This is mainly because of their political institutional nature as instruments for aggregating and channelling diverse interests and engaging citizens in political processes. Women’s near invisibility in core political executive positions indicates that political parties, which are responsible for nominating candidates for elections and making political appointments in the executive branch, have lukewarm attitudes towards women’s empowerment and effective participation in politics.

Documented patterns of women’s participation in post-colonial Nigeria are nothing less than a mockery of typical open system procedures. Studies show that in both civilian and military regimes, but mostly in the latter, first lady offices are deployed to garner women’s support for the regime (see Mama 1998). Patronage exchanges in the form of selective empowerment projects funded by state agents and under the direction of the chief political executive are common channels of women’s co-optation.

Moreover, inter-ethnic marriages have added a peculiar force to the chief executive’s roles and selective social support. Analysts recount that most Nigerian chief political executives have converted marriage into a tool for consolidating political power rather than liberating women from patriarchal constraints (Ibrahim 2003: 35, cf Mama 1995, Okeke 1998). In Nigeria, marriage constitutes a powerful cultural bond founded on informal power, family ties and ethnic group solidarity. In particular, inter-ethnic bonds of marriage at the elite level reinforce networks that can

and do emerge in society as a reservoir of social support for the chief political executives involved.

As long as women's participation continues to be tied to the conservative man's cloak or circumscribed by patriarchy as a typical form of 'traditional authority' bounded by personalized power and roles (Bendix 1962: 330–334, cf Weber 1968), the opportunity structure will continue to be skewed in favour of men. The dependent and insignificant nature of women's participation in the Nigerian polity has serious implications for both theory and practice. First, political development will remain deficient without significant and effective inclusion of women in politics. Second, insufficient political participation by women is a sign of a weak political culture.

In particular, analysts believe that in their most advanced form open political systems value the rights to freedom and equality that support and institutionalize substantive social inclusion (Welzel and Inglehart 2008). A lack of women's participation in political executive processes indicates not only the fragility of political institutions in Nigeria, but it also implies the closure of opportunities to a significant portion of the population. This curbing of opportunities continues in the Nigerian polity today despite various structural changes explicitly designed to ensure otherwise.

Ineffective participation by women serves also to reinforce elite reproduction because it reduces the efficacy of political executive actions outside the support of the female population in Nigeria. The population of women in Nigeria can be described as a rich source of political power, starting from its numerical strength – as women are almost equal in number to men. According to the 2006 census, of Nigeria's 140 million inhabitants, women account for 68.3 million or 49%. In practice, the greatly circumscribed participation of women weakens political contestation. Women's marginalization from political processes and the circumscription of their participation to men's or spouse's agency, severely limits the quality of political outcomes under men's 'monopoly' control of political processes.

Although, constitutional barriers to women's participation have been absent from the Nigerian polity since 1979, the institutional pathway to effective public contestation that includes women citizens still suffers setbacks under an array of obstacles within the opportunity structure. For example, violence and fraud have been major features of most elec-

tions since political independence. Women especially are victimized and constrained because of their subordination and weaker status in society. Within the patriarchal system that denies women access to valuable resources under weak formal and informal political institutions, elections as means of acquiring authority and legitimate right to rule often fail to produce responsive and responsible elite leaders. Women's lack of participation in core political executive offices has enhanced the profusion of men's appearances and, importantly, the shaping of political power and roles through men's values and interests. Thus, the relative absence of women in the most exalted political executive offices contributes to restrict the quality of elite circulation while maintaining quantity through common socialization and convenient political settlements among the elite hierarchies of men.

### **5.2.3 Circularity by Professional and Sectoral Origin**

The professional and sectoral background of those holding core political executive offices is a crucial dimension in the investigation of elite participation in high offices since colonial rule in Nigeria. An important analytical basis hereby is the liberal-pluralist view that professional class constitutes the appropriate backdrop for interest representation. Table 5.2 shows that university teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats, technocrats, business persons and military officers rose to prominent positions in core political executive offices after decolonization. These professional elite groups have dominated the highest echelons of Nigerian politics since independence (1960). By contrast, the rate of circularity of the non-university teachers declined steadily to zero as regimes and resources shifted over time. This finding demonstrates that the professional composition of the political executive elite in Nigeria has been characterized by modernization through educationally inspired change. Table 5.2 reveals the typical professional elite background of those participating in core political executive offices since colonial rule.

**Table 5.2**  
**Cumulative Frequencies of Core Political Elite Circularity**  
**by Professional Grouping (1960-2007)**

Professions	Periodic Regime Changes									
	1960-66 (Civilian)		1966-79 (Military)		1979-83 (Civilian)		1984-98 (Military)		1999-07 (Civilian)	
	N(a)	% (b)	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-Univ Teachers	47	43.9	30	5.7	14	10.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Univ. Teachers	09	8.4	39	7.5	12	9.1	57	8.2	42	18.4
Lawyers	31	29.0	27	5.2	26	19.7	24	3.4	22	9.6
Bureaucrats	11	10.3	18	3.5	33	25.0	26	3.7	15	6.6
Technocrats	3	2.8	39	7.5	29	22.0	63	9.0	45	19.7
Diplomats	0	0.0	00	0.0	2	1.5	0	0.0	10	4.4
Trader	1	0.9	00	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.5	0	0.0
Military Officers	0	0.0	345	66.2	0	0.0	450	64.5	40	17.5
Business	4	3.7	10	1.9	12	9.1	30	4.3	30	13.1
Not Known	1	0.9	13	2.5	4	3.0	45	6.4	24	10.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) Cumulative numbers of professionals, (b) Aggregated percentage of professionals

Source: Classified from various editions of the *Europa Yearbook* (Africa South of the Sahara), the *Nigerian Yearbook* and *Who's Who in Nigeria*

Observe that the political demand for professionals does not seem to have varied much over the different regimes. The overt quest for (good) governance and legitimacy since independence seems to have driven a demand for bureaucrats, lawyers, technocrats and businesspersons plus a good number of university professors. Also, there was an upsurge of military elite in the civilian domain in the latest civilian regime (3CR: 1999–2007). Data reveal that for the first time in a post-colonial civilian regime (3CR: 1999–2007), the presence of political executive members with a military background was high at 17.5% of the total participants.

This advance of military politicians into typical civilian spheres of influence diminishes the prospects of civilian-groomed professionals participating in political processes because of the crowding-out (marginalization) effects it represents. Although militarily trained cabinet officers may be retired, they remain strongly attached to military interests and habits, such as the use of force to enhance political authority. For example, Obasanjo's response to the Odi protesters in the Niger Delta region on 20 November 1999 (see Human Rights Watch 1999, see also Colin 2000) was a show of force and brutality akin to military styles of discipline, lit-

tle tolerant to opposition and averse to negotiation and compromise. Despite extensive training abroad, the political civility of the military is no less militarized. Indeed, military structure and participation in government processes have not only dishonoured the government's reputation in Nigeria but have been disruptive of democratic maturity as well (Ihonvbere 1998, Akinrinade 2006).

Similar experiences of the continued military link with politics led Kooning (2001) to state that 'full democratic consolidation depends on the full subordination of security forces under civilian rule' (pp. 402–403). The diffused and inordinate use of force inside and outside the state or what Kooning (*ibid.*) calls 'new violence' can shrink the state's capacity to protect rights of freedom and equality. Insufficient protection of these rights implies institutional fragility and inoperative civil rights and political liberties. In practice, institutional weaknesses provoked by excessive and repeated recourse to state violence has worked to consolidate incumbency votes and to quell protests. It has thus hindered democratic transition in Nigeria. Consequently, the political competition and participation necessary for solidifying the political regime has receded in favour of an elite-elite struggle for political power and the use of state resources to favour incumbency bids.

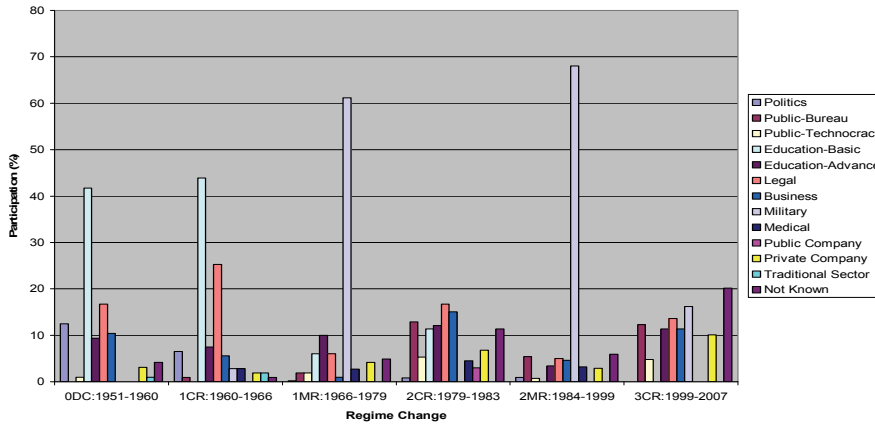
Violence, especially if it is widespread in state and society, places 'strain on any political system', warned Dahl (1995: 78–79). The political scientist pointed out, '[I]t is usually difficult to coerce a large number of people, even if not a majority, because the more coercion the lesser the chances of the political system's survival' (*ibid.*). The Niger Delta crisis is a current and most illustrative case of marginalization, violent forms of state-society relationship and the political executive's constriction of the right to freedom and equality of opportunities. The Niger Delta impasse can be traced back to the formative period of political power composition in post-colonial Nigeria, which operated in favour of an ethno-regional structure of power relations with majority ethnic groups at the vanguard (Graf 1988, Osaghae 1998). This historic legacy appears to be based more on the self-indulgent character of the elite and their manipulation of political rights than the insurgent acts of ethnic groups simply clamouring for fair resource distribution.

The skewed nature of the federal power structure in Nigeria has long implied privileged access to and control of state resources based on distinctive ethnic markers. Reinforced by the institutionalization of the

‘Federal Character’ principle amid structural changes, the skewed power structure of Nigeria impinges directly on the institutional capacity of the state to protect competition and promote social inclusiveness. Political competition has been transformed instead into rivalry and physical combat between the elites. The use of violence has seemingly become a permanent feature of elite composition in terms of access to and maintenance of power positions.

Figure 5.3 portrays the sector of origin of the political executive elite, distinguishing the various professions represented (Table 5.2). Sector of origin reflects the attempt to capture the multiple activities or professions that each participant has exercised in particular social spheres before or upon assuming a key position in central government executive offices. The data distribution confirms the growth of the intellectual, technocratic, bureaucratic and legal professions. It also shows the gradual disappearance of lower cadre teachers in the political executive. The dataset further demonstrates the military infiltration in politics.

**Figure 5.3**  
*Participation by Sector of Origin and Regime*



**Source:** Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Interestingly, the sector of origin highlights the constant presence of the business elite. Whether dependent on government patronage (Bayart 1993), self-propelled (Forrest 1994) or interlocked with other activities, the cream of the Nigerian business class, from both the mercantile and the industrial sub-sectors, appears consistently represented and so has been a strong voice in Nigerian politics. Historically, the business elite were the most consistent office-holders. Even in the colonial period, from about 1922, commercialists and traders were recruited into the colonial executive council to enhance colonial interests (Dudley 1966, Basse 2009). However, the interests and values of the economic elite appear to have been fundamentally transformed into political power pursuits in the post-colonial period.

Cohen (1972: 235) observed that social insecurities felt by the emergent Nigerian elite and aspirants to upper class positions occupied by the incumbent 'imported oligarchy' (carefully selected and topmost colonial administrators) significantly marked the attitudes and behaviours of the emergent political actors in their struggle for political power. In other words, the amassing of political power assumed primacy as the means for securing not just wealth but also social and political protection, authority and prestige. The drive for these attributes stemmed from the uncertainties about the transition from colonial to post-colonial rule. In other words, wealth already accumulated through colonial privileges and opportunities was an issue, but along with it was the capture and use of political power to defend the former and ensure further accumulation. This primary pursuit of political power appears to have been maintained up to this day.

Data about the sector of origin also captures the important category of politicians, i.e. participants who, despite other professional background, have dedicated themselves almost exclusively to political activities. The sector coded 'politics' (Figure 5.3) featured significantly in political executive office during decolonization (i.e. after basic education and legal sectors). After decolonization, Dudley (1966) records that early politicians, such as Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo from the South and Sir Ahmadu Bello and Alhaji Sir Tafawa Balewa from the North, were the first-on-the-scene nationalist leaders who stepped into the power vacuum when the British withdrew. However, from 1CR, they began to cede their places to other categories such as people with an advanced education.

The second type of elite to emerge in the political processes linked to executive offices, as shown by Dudley (1966), was the professionals and business persons. During this period of political executive elite formation, the federal minister from the business elite circle was Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh. As observed in *Who's Who in Nigeria*, Okotie-Eboh was labour and welfare minister of cabinet rank from 1954 to 1957 before rising to the office of minister of finance to replace Alhaji Balewa, who was promoted from the finance ministry to prime minister in 1957 by the departing British officials. Observers believe that the appointment as finance minister of Okotie-Eboh, who was a member of a minority ethnic group from the western region (later the Mid-West) and belonged to a different political party, owed to his close friendship with Tafawa Balewa (Aderemi 2004/2005). Okotie-Eboh's appointment was perhaps an early sign of a 'friendship-based' patronage, which grew in kind and degree during the later years of the post-colony.

The business elite appear to have had strong participation in various governments across diverse regimes. Most political executives own businesses in the private sector. Moreover, the marketing boards controlled by regional governments were manipulated by political executives and political party leaders to finance elections at the federal level (Dudley 1982) through patronage-based networks. Apart from the participation of business owners from the private sector, data also captures the engagement of top-ranking administrators (technocrats) from manufacturing and financial institutions such as banks. In other words, government support is wide-ranging and socially powerful but not short of a selective and similar elite background that tends to uphold its own special interests more than public interests.

The data on sector of origin captures the accentuated nature of participation by individuals from common social, economic and political sectors. For example, the distribution of the respective data reflects the reappearance of the legal class in a pattern notably different from the more constant business class participation. Members of the legal elite participated more markedly during civilian regimes than in military regimes. The presence of the legal sector during 1CR: 1960–1966 was about four times stronger than in 1MR: 1966–1979, although the latter lasted much longer. The same pattern, though with lower levels of participation, was visible in the subsequent civilian and military regimes.



The need for lawyers to deal with constitutional issues mostly in favour of government actions seems more accentuated during civilian regimes than in autocratic regimes, when matters were mostly adjudicated by military fiat. The recruitment of the political executive elite from the legal sector not only reinforced the socio-cultural elite dimension of the political class supporters of the regime but also underlines the greater authority of lawyers in democratic than in authoritarian regimes in the Nigerian system. Participation from other sectors of the socio-cultural elite, such as the medical profession with the public and private company management sectors, has been significant but less so than the participation of the business and legal elite.

As shown in Figure 5.3, career politicians were more visible during ODC: 1951–1960 and 1CR: 1960–1966 but gradually disappeared afterwards. This suggests that from the time ‘politicians’ began to be associated with corruption in Nigeria, political office aspirants began to shift their labels to other professions in order to ascend to political executive power and roles. Despite the passive nature of socialization of the military at the invitation of civilian politicians (Nwaolise 1995), the military has not been active in civilian regimes directly or indirectly except in the Third Republic. The idea of a political strongman linked to the military sector still endures within the Nigerian society. Most retired military personnel become political ‘godfathers’ or explore the loopholes created in the constitution during military regimes to re-emerge, under recycled conditions, in political executive processes.

Except during decolonization, the military sector has been behind all the transitions to democracy in Nigeria. It was thus the military that laid the foundation for the various constitutional reforms. Military political elites determined the scope of liberalization and democratization by dictating the pace and formation of the political parties that contest and eventually win elections. This participation explains why post-colonial efforts towards openness and inclusiveness have taken turbulent pathways and led to weak outcomes. Apart from overstretched periods of transition (Inhonvbere 1998, Diamond et al. 1999), poor governance is linked with social oppression and selective elite participation in political executive offices in ways that encumber public accountability (Bratton and Logan 2006, Kifordu 2010).

Historically, military interests became inextricably linked to those of civilian political agents, the business sector and ultimately the oil sector.

It was during the early stages of 1MR: 1966–1979 that the regions were stripped of their autonomy over resource generation and control (Osaghae 1998). Centralization of authority thus became a hallmark of the forcefulness of military regimes, ushering in a push-and-pull game between centralization and decentralization that has been going on since. This ‘tug of war’ has produced immobilism (stifled decision-making processes). Symptomatic of this condition are lethargic political institutions whose existence and persistence derive from a political class that depends for its survival more on state resources than on the people’s input. The current study’s data about professional background and sector of origin distinguish the direct participation of the socio-cultural, economic, military and political elite categories in the political executive offices.

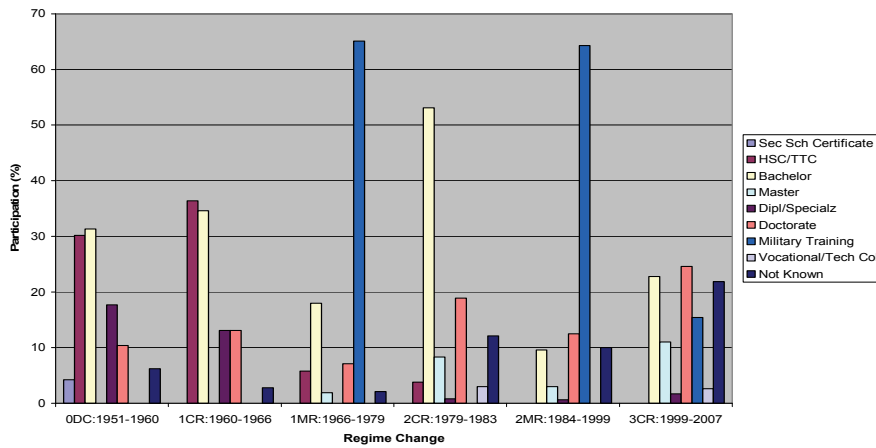
This study makes a theoretical and analytical distinction between social classes that autonomously compete for state power in order to defend their professional or group (association) interests, and the political class, which depends on state resources to fulfil its particular interests. Therefore, participation of the professional-cum-sector elite in political executive offices in Nigeria indicates contradictory roles. Omodia (2010) eloquently highlighted this paradox between social class participation and a governance system operated by state agents in Nigeria: ‘[I]n a system where the masses are deceived at the ethnic level of politics and excluded at the class level of politics, the Marxian concept of dictatorship of the masses is a model fixed in heaven’ (pp. 129–133). This can be interpreted to imply that contrary to the Marxist belief in revolution through revolt of the masses, the political class occupants of executive power use manipulation to divert the attention of the masses away from conscious movements towards a significant overturning of the power structure.

#### 5.2.4 Circularity by Educational Qualifications

The data about educational qualifications (Figure 5.4) and place of study (Figure 5.5) exhibit a pattern similar to that of professional formation (see Figure 5.3). In fact, profession tends to follow from education. Since decolonization, and as regimes evolved, educational qualifications gradually progressed in such a way that those with higher educational qualifications began to displace secondary school, teacher training and vocational training certificate holders on the pathway to key political offices. Though there were no constitutional limits or legal preconditions for participating in political offices, these lower certificate holders gradually

disappeared from government. It is likely that the acquisition of higher qualifications does not strictly imply the renewals of membership and ideas but the consolidation of existing ones and admission of likeminded members, i.e. with common attributes (profession, sector of origin and communal origins) and interests.

**Figure 5.4**  
Participation (%) by Educational Qualification and Regime



Source: Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Certain differences and similarities can be noted in the participation of individuals and groups in the core political executive elite through educational qualifications. Firstly, and most obviously, the participation of holders of non-graduate, graduate and post-graduate diplomas dropped sharply as the military took over government power on two different occasions (1MR: 1966–1979 and 2MR: 1984–1999). That is, despite openings at the entry level to political executive office, especially for those in younger age brackets (see Figure 5.1, particularly during the first military regime), the opportunity structure for participation in the core political executive elite was virtually closed to members of the public outside the military.

During the first period of military rule (1MR: 1966–1979), more bachelor's degree holders were in office (94 out of 521 or 18%) than in the second military period (2MR: 1984–1999). In this latter regime, relative participation by bachelor's degree holders was half the previous proportion (9.6% or 67 of the 698 participants) (Figure 5.4). Conversely, fewer doctorate degree holders participated in the first military period (7.1% or 37) compared to the second military period (12.5% or 87). One plausible explanation is that as more pressure was exerted on the political labour market, recruitment criteria inclined towards higher qualifications. It is noteworthy that during the second military regime, more precisely from Babangida's (1985–1993) government, a structural adjustment programme was introduced under neo-liberal policy guidelines prescribed by World Bank agents. Firstly, it should be recognized that this external context and influence emerged mainly because of the vulnerability of the political system rather than a scarcity of resources, as Nigeria's external debt was exacerbated by the political mismanagement of oil funds. The exigencies of the IMF and World Bank might have prompted the intake of highly qualified technocrats observed, from 7.5% in 1MR: 1966–1979 to 9% in 2MR: 1984–1999.

During the current civilian regime (3CR: 1999–2007), particularly during Obasanjo's government in which structural reforms were intensified, more technocrats and holders of higher qualifications such as doctorate degrees were recruited into the cabinet. About 24% held a doctorate degree, while 23% were bachelors, 11% master's degree holders and 4% possessed specialization certificates. As already emphasized, these changes do not necessarily imply the recruitment of fresh elite participants with higher credentials. Neither did they translate into any change in values as the immediate effect of more years of schooling, training and higher levels of qualifications.

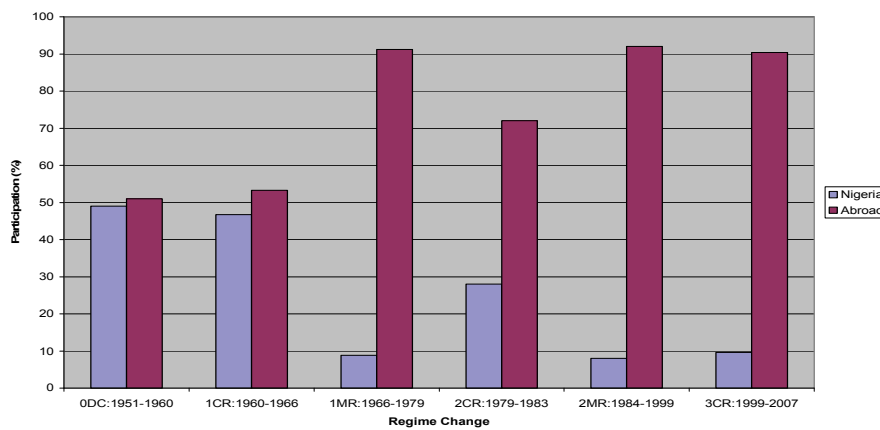
The inclination to recruit people with higher qualifications did not imply that achievement criteria based on education were eventually preferred over ascription. Considering the significance of informal power as applied in the Nigerian polity through ethnic manipulation and selective application of 'Federal Character', the true intention of higher educational qualifications for political recruitment is rendered dubious. Moreover, participants with military training increased, as can be observed in Figure 5.5, to about 16% of office-holders during the first two mandates of the current civilian regime (1999–2007). Schooling abroad has, since

colonial rule, become an important input in the process of recruiting the political executive elite; the next subsection deals with elite circulation in political executive offices based on such experiences abroad.

### 5.2.5 Participation by Place of Study

It is revealing to observe the environment in which elites received their education or training before and during their experience in political office. A large proportion of Nigerians in core political executive offices studied abroad. Only in two periods were similar proportions of the political executive elite schooled within Nigeria and abroad; this was during decolonization (ODC: 1951–1960) and the first civilian government (1CR: 1960–1966), which was practically a continuation from the former period (Figure 5.5). However, while the proportion of elite participants with a school diploma acquired at home fell after decolonization and the First Republic government, there has been a steady increase of elite participants who obtained a school diploma abroad.

**Figure 5.5**  
Participation (%) by Place of Study and Regime



Source: Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Liberal perspectives on political socialization view formal schooling, and especially schooling abroad, as a valuable experience and source of attitude formation favourable to democratic change (Diamond et al. 1988, Diamond and Morlino 2004). The recruitment of individuals who received training at foreign universities and other such western institutions is expected to increase elite competition and quality through socialization (Diamond et al. 1988). Historically, as reported by Graf (1988), the pioneer elite and nationalist leaders of Nigeria experienced different levels of schooling and training abroad. However, if patronage exchanges and corruption are observed to permeate elite attitudes (as will be shown in the next chapter) then study abroad (especially among elite participants in political executive offices) would not appear to have been adequately applied to promote political development in the Nigerian polity.

Data on study abroad (Figure 5.5) shows the large number of elite participants in military regimes to receive training in foreign institutions (more than 90%). This proportion is greater than that of civilian foreign-educated counterparts in civilian regimes (at or less than 90%). However, military training received abroad is at odds with a liberal orientation and would be expected to constitute a setback to the transformation of attitudes required for effective governance reforms through openness and inclusiveness. Military training is usually based on hierarchic discipline and lessons about the use of violence to enforce territorial integrity. This is a markedly different curriculum from that of civilian schooling, which can be expected to emphasize respect for human rights and equality and the use of persuasion, negotiation and compromise to achieve peace and progress. Nigeria's reality confirms this contrast between military training received mostly abroad and volatility of political institutions since the military intervened and has continually participated in political executive offices. This does not mean that oppressive attitudes are limited to military executive elites. Indeed, civilian political elites' excessive use of violence during elections is at odds with the formal schooling and liberal lessons received both at home and abroad since decolonization.

## 5.3 Communal Background

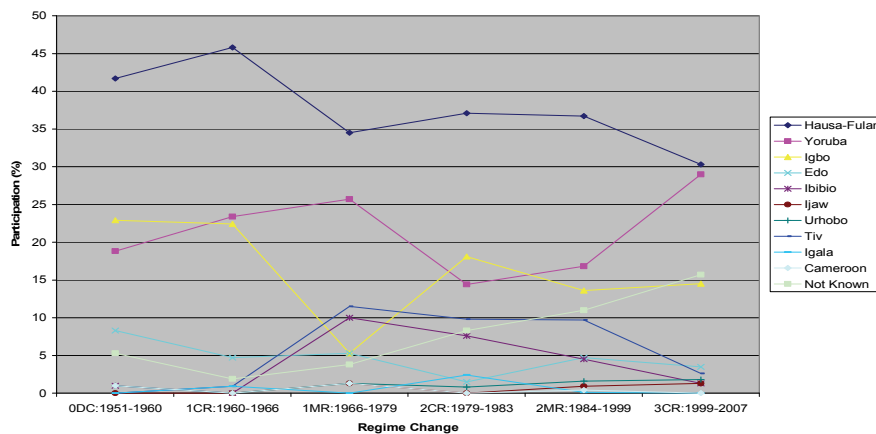
### 5.3.1 Circularity by Ethnic Origin and Size

Analytically, it is difficult to separate the trio of ethnicity, religion and regional origin in Nigerian politics. But as the data about communal origins are classified by ethnic origin, size of ethnic group, and religious and regional background, each aspect will be displayed separately. First, data on ethnic origin in Figure 5.6 highlight the disproportionate presence in core political executive offices of individuals from the three major ethnic groups, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, respectively, from the North, West and East of Nigeria. Moreover, the pattern of individual or group membership in political executive offices appears to be associated with the ‘strongman’ (Bratton and de Walle 1997) or chief executive’s ethnic, religious and regional background. Despite important structural changes aimed at diffusing the symbiotically reinforcing influences of ethnicity and regional origin, ethnic morphology – or differences in communal attributes – has continued to play an important role. The chief executive’s origin has been significantly linked to that of the cabinet members, even during political coalitions that cut across ethnic origin.

The Hausa-Fulani ethnic group’s leadership has been particularly dominant since decolonization. Under the parliamentary system (1960–1966), the group’s presence soared to 45.8%. The fact that the chief executive hailed from the North appears to have had real and symbolic effects on recruitment. Firstly, party politics linked to ethnic affiliations and voting patterns created platforms for convenient coalitions and first-order cabinet appointments made by incumbent leaders holding state power. Figure 5.6 shows that during the first period of military rule (1MR: 1966–1979), the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group topped cabinet appointments and regional representations, while the Yoruba rose to the second position, ahead of the Ibos, who were shut off by the civil war. About a decade after the end of the war and with the inauguration of Shagari’s civil government (2CR: 1979–1984), the Igbos reassumed the second position while the Yoruba receded to the third. Notably, an Igbo (Alex Ekwueme) became vice president. However, as the ‘pendulum’ of political executive office-holding swung back, members of the Yoruba ethnic group again rose to occupy the second position under 2MR: 1984–1998.

The influence of the strongman's ethnic origin once more became manifest when Obasanjo (1999–2007) from the Yoruba ethnic group assumed the presidency under a democratic regime. He opened the 'cabinet door' widely to his kin, through the discretionary executive powers of appointment. He used this power so independently and preferentially that the proportion of Yoruba participants was on par with that of the Hausa-Fulani members. Figure 5.6 shows the semi-circular tendency in the period of Obasanjo's administration (3CR: 1999–2007). Ethnic origin and its correlation with recruitment demonstrate the characteristic application of status symbols alongside socio-economic attributes, especially professional classes. An ethnic analyst noted, 'ethnicity does not artificially divert from economic interest and its faithful reflection of those interests', after asserting that 'ethnic groups and classes rarely overlap perfectly because while the former is based on passionate appeals the latter derives from economic interests' (Horowitz 1985: 105–106).

**Figure 5.6**  
*Participation by Ethnic Origin and Regime (%)*



*Source:* Classified data from various editions of Year Books, Who is Who in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

In other words, communal background can historically interlock with class background in ways that lead to symbiotic elite typologies that



jointly reinforce the instrumentalist use of office power and status symbols (Cohen 1972, Kofele-Kale 1976). This means that the so-called ethnic group leaders have real economic interests that they seek to realize. In the Nigerian polity, ethnic morphology is combined with class differences, (reflected, e.g. in education, profession and political party) to enhance access to and retention of political power. For example, a man from the majority ethnic group and regional power base with a socially valued profession (military, technocrat and university professor) is more acceptable for first-order ministerial appointment than, say, a woman labour leader who is from a minority ethnic group. That is, ethnic appeals can serve class interests under certain circumstances.

The domination of certain ethnicities in high political offices is often justified by population ordering. Yet elite circulation can also be dependent on the personality of the communal agent. Moreover, clientele formation and the preference of the chief political executive for own ethnic cohorts may come at the expense of social demands. In the process, symbolic roles are substituted for the social roles that the political elite ought to play and which should lead to the satisfaction of social demands. That is, roles may come to be played through status symbols that fail to yield meaningful social outcomes but are associated with the whims and caprices of the 'strongman' leader (Dike 1999, Diamond 2008). The distribution of political executive offices by ethnic origin and size of ethnic group enables the elite to intermingle through their common background and encourages cohesive and conformist elite composition and interests.

The Nigerian constitution prohibits the use of ethnic symbols for political purposes. However, the informal coalitions assumed to cut across ethnic lines not only operate to strengthen national networks but also develop along ethnic lines and leadership. A pertinent observation is that ethnic background, or the derivation of the political elite from a particular ethnic group, has not implied representation of the interests of that ethnic group since colonial rule. Ethnic groups appear to be manipulated by ethnic group leaders who seek elected and appointed political offices rather than being represented through the effective channelling of social interests. It could be suggested that the so-called ethnic violence that persists in Nigeria is associated with a lack of social and political development, which in turn drives the breaking loose of 'primordial or communal boundaries [ethnic, religious and regional forces] into the political

arena with disastrous outcomes' (Kukah 2003: 101). For example, the current violent and destructive reactions to the 2011 presidential election demonstrate the profusion (excesses) of ethnic sentiments and loyalties that are likely based on manipulations by the political elite of Nigeria.

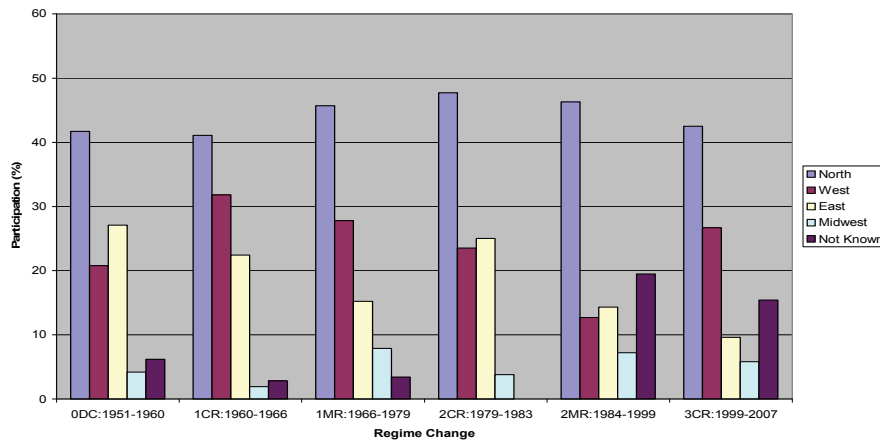
### 5.3.2 Circularity by Regional Origin

The linkage between first-order cabinet membership and specific aspects of ethnic morphology such as regional identities can be understood based on various factors. First, the active presence of representatives of the northern region, especially the Hausa-Fulani, in core political executive offices has been more consistent than that of other ethnic groups. Figure 5.7 shows the North's overwhelming majority representation in political executive offices. Shagari's government tops the list, despite the cross-regional alliances during his tenure. Williams (1999) showed that cross-cutting ethno-regional, socio-cultural and political coalitions and alliances during Shagari's government raised hopes for the national unity and development which have eluded Nigeria since colonial rule. However, ethnic hegemonic interests not only re-emerged to sideline whatever pro-unity intentions existed among the political elites, but they also provoked intra- and inter-party squabbles that further cleared the way for the political class to reassert its dominance (Williams 1999, Gunther and Diamond 2003). In essence, there have been few differences between military and civilian regimes as to the typical ethno-regional pattern of over-representation of elite leaders.

Size of the ethnic group has been influential, but it does not simply explain the assumed distinctive and conflictive primordial traits in political elite circularity. Rather, there are indications of historic 'cut and mix' leadership initiatives (Smith and Hutchinson 1996). That is, regional elite manipulations motivated by religious aims have been instrumental in shaping regional control at the centre of political power. Though the introduction of Sharia religious laws in political interactions at the secular level has been mostly in northern states (Paden 2008), it has boosted the strength of northern leaders in the central government by heightening religious cohesiveness and garnering support from Muslims. Also, since Uthman dan Fodio's nineteenth century Fulani jihad, the Hausa-Fulani fusion and hegemonic intentions have been observed as transcending the religious motivations of strict adherence to the Islamic faith. Fusion and regional hegemony have systematically included economic and political

interests (Kukah 1993). This mixture clearly depicts the translation of communal (ethnic, religious and regional) features to political class interests, as suggested by Horowitz (1985).

**Figure 5.7**  
Participation by Regional Origin and Regime (%)



Source: Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

The colonial period (1914–1950) and decolonization (1951–1960) witnessed the consolidation of northern political power through the formation of political parties (see Makintosh 1966). The Native Authority (NA), formed during the colonial period, metamorphosed from the Jami’iyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) or ‘Association of Peoples of the North’ and dissolved into a cohesive party caucus (Northern People’s Congress – NPC) that survived colonial rule (Sklar 1963, Makintosh 1966, Dudley 1982). From the 1960s, regionalism, military force and printed media with radio communication (Kukah 1993) provided a wider outlet for the political socialization of northern leaders, who became increasingly vocal and defensive of northern values and interests at the federal level. Northern leadership was also distinguished by personality traits and ethno-regional commitments. The region’s leaders, like Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, preferred premiership of the

northern region and entrusted the reputable position of first prime minister of Nigeria to a co-regional confidant Mallam Abubakar T. Balewa (Dudley 1982).

Indeed, the morbid fear of destruction based on mutual distrust (Horowitz 1985) among the major ethnic groups has been historically orchestrated and used as means to build protective walls and guide the interests of each group so as to continually imperil democratic stability. This strange attitude and behaviour towards governance generated conflict. Even under military rule, such fears never abated. The unilateral annulment of the 12 June 1993 elections and the sharp protests it provoked are signs of the morbid fear and mutual distrust of ethnic domination. The aftermath of the annulment actually took on an interregional conflict dimension because a northerner was the incumbent state leader and a southerner was implicitly or explicitly denied the chance of forming the next federal cabinet.

State power at the federal level increasingly nurtured northern political and economic ambitions based on typical political styles that were a carbon copy of the hitherto institutionalized Native Authority. Moreover, loyalty to the Emir of Sokoto whose ancestry was linked to Uthman dan Fodio, the famed jihadist leader of the nineteenth century, was practically a sacred tradition there. Conversely, liberal education and individualistic tendencies – rather than unconditional loyalty to royalties – seems to have motivated more selfish than community orientations in the southern region (south-west and south-east with their adjacent minorities). Personal interests were usually sustained, sometimes in favour of political values. Ethnic chauvinism, discrimination and social mobility by ascription or inheritance were more practised than collaboration, open competition and inclusion based on merit. The result was two extremely rooted and opposing values from the regions, converging at the national level to consolidate power to the detriment of popular participation.

Even when contingent factors, such as war and the oil boom, emerged to cement elite unity and settlement in favour of development, as foretold by elite settlement analysts (see Burton and Higley 1998), these mostly ended up in furtherance of elite values and interests at the expense of public preferences. Hence, the regional nature of elite representation and political power composition of the national executive power structure turned out to be a countervailing force (equally strong but with

opposite effects) to public choice. Indeed, the northern power bloc historically has had a certain political advantage based on population that earned the group the lion's share (more than 50%) of national wealth, a good part of it produced outside northern fringes (see Yin 2009).

However, real monolithic regional power dominance appears to be based more on intentions and unilateral struggles than on real prospects of achievement without multilateral opposition. The power balance in the Nigerian polity seems to have been carefully maintained over time by and for the interests of select political elite members from across regional boundaries. In spite of the high frequency of northern regional headship of the political executive power structure (Orji 2008), amid fierce intra-elite disputes for political power succession, the Nigerian political class seems conscious that a regional leader is necessary to guarantee continuity without unwarranted impositions. Nigeria, recalled Crowder (1987), has repeatedly headed towards the precipice but never gets all the way in. In other words, a regional leadership made up of a national elite caucus seems more desirable to the Nigerian elite than a regional elite dominance capable of threatening multilateral interests.

So, the extraordinary elite consensus culture appears to be activated at difficult moments, and it is readily deactivated to enable the return to business as usual. The political elite consensus stratagem appears to save Nigeria from total collapse but does not guarantee the country's complete evasion of the political abyss. For example, Obasanjo's candidacy and election in 1999 seems to have saved Nigeria from imminent collapse following the 12 June 1993 election debacle. But it did not save the country from the acute social strife that remains in evidence today. The 'consensus' presidency under northern concession (Ibelema 2000: 213) appeared to have cemented Obasanjo's succession leading to his re-ascendance to political power with subsequent changes in the power composition that were not far from ethnic political intentions. Northern leadership under the aegis of the Hausa-Fulani hegemony and Sokoto caliphate has been built on far-reaching historic and cultural relationships. However, continuity in northern leadership (especially during the post-colonial period) has received a big boost from military dictatorships. In other words, the dynamics of northern dominance since the first military regime (1MR: 1966–1979) have been built on the forceful power and influence exerted on the federal government structure.

**Table 5.3**  
*Ethno-Regional Origin of Chief Political Executives amid Regime Change (1960-2007)*

Ethno-Regional Nature	Majority Ethnic Size (%)	Frequency Leadership		Frequency Religious Affiliations			Frequency Regime Types	
		N	%	Muslim	Christian	Others	Civilian	Military
Hausa-Fulani-Majority North	29	8	57.1	8	0	0	3	5
Yoruba - Majority West	21	3	21.4	0	3	0	2*	1
Igbo - Majority East	18	2	14.3	0	2	0	1	1
Minority Combined	32	1**	7.2	0	1	0	0	1
Total	100	14	100	8	6	0	6	8

Source: Compiled and classified from *Whos's Who in Nigeria*, Africa South of the Sahara and Government Gazettes since Independence (1960).

\* One served in both military and civilian regime.

\*\*As at 2007 when Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was elected as President, only one ruler (Gen Yakubu Gowon) from the minority part of the Northern region occupied the chief executive office. Subsequently, Goodluck Jonathan became the Niger Delta minority leader who rose from the office of the vice-president to succeed Yar'Adua after the latter died of illness in 2010.

Table 5.3 shows that 57.1% or eight out of fourteen chief executives, including repeated occupancies over different regimes, hail from the northern majority. Similarly, six or two-thirds of the nine occupants were members of the armed forces of Nigeria. Former military head of state, Retired General Y. Gowon was a northerner but from the northern minority. He was therefore not counted as belonging to the northern majority by tribal or even religious affiliation. Constitutional changes involving such sensitive issues as state creation or introduction of Sharia laws plus major executive appointments, especially ministerial office placements at the federal level, have directly or indirectly been influenced by northern military strongmen.

Moreover, major political alliances have frequently been sought or made with the northern elite group since colonial rule (see Vaughan 1995, 2005). Northern boundaries have been adjusted and readjusted

disproportionately by military leaders with implicit 'pork barrel' political intentions. 'Pork barrel' politics implies the introduction of legislation or the taking of political decisions by the incumbent to enhance continuity and to legitimate illegal actions that benefit own or sectional interests.

Yet, northern control at the political executive level is not based merely on size. The North also derives its power from a constructive appeal to tradition at the micro-level (grassroots) and to political and economic interests pursued at the macro-level (national government). In this, it quite often challenges the tenets of open competition and inclusiveness, especially their role in enhancing democratic changes. Northern leadership has historically epitomized the capacity to mobilize communal ethno-regional and religious forces to obtain powerful positions in the political executive so as to defend economic interests (Kukah 1993). Southern leaders are no less self-oriented. That is, self-interest has been a pervasive feature of the political class and core political executive elite. It has promoted their cohesiveness and persistence since political independence.

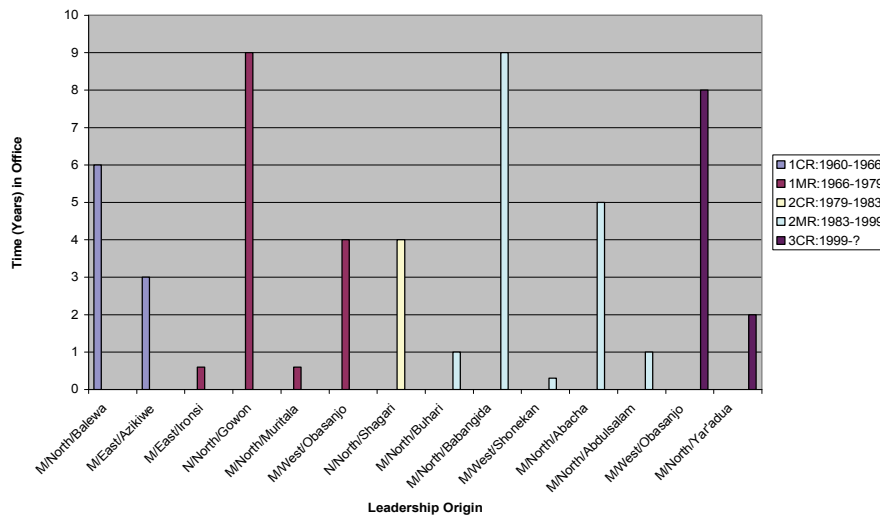
### **5.3.3 Minority Status in First-Order Cabinet Offices**

The historic exclusion of minorities from first-order ministerial appointments, often directed by the head of state, president and commander in chief of the armed forces, are captured by the data. Table 5.3 and Figure 5.8 portray the gap between inclusion and exclusion in the political processes that really matter for setting agendas at the national government level. The struggle for political power, as dominated by the majority ethnic group leaders, is perhaps a major source not only of resentments but also of social and political conflict.

In Figure 5.8, the labels 'M/North', 'M/East', 'M/West' and 'N/North' are used to differentiate majority (M) and minority (N) office-holding categories. The figure confirms the absence of minority participation in the chief political executive offices, which have been occupied fourteen times since decolonization and independence with only one occupant who hails from the minority part of the historically cohesive Northern region. Control, advantage and authority over rewards and value distribution have been at the core of the struggle to access the top-most executive positions. In this struggle, ethnic markers have been used

to form opinions and trigger feelings that sensibly detour from the nationalist pattern, reminiscent of the colonial and decolonization periods.

**Figure 5.8**  
*Political Leadership Participation by Ethnic Origin, Region and Time (Years) in Office*



**Source:** Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

This means that no significant changes have occurred in the communal composition of the core political executive elite since decolonization. Instead of a continued struggle for liberation of all forms (political, economic and social) and levels (external and internal), ethnic groups became reclusive under the various post-independence leaderships. Although ethno-regional struggle for dominance at the centre preceded independence, there were signs of interregional economic and social cooperation and open competition. It was relatively easier for one regionally rooted political party to win seats in another region than it became after independence and the revolutionary impact of oil revenues on government coffers since the 1970s. This latter has led political leadership attention significantly and ostentatiously away from whatever ideal of



national orientation carried over from sentiment upon independence. The rhetoric quickly shifted away from national integration to colonial legacy constraints.

Conflict eventually became inevitable, when the masses, particularly minority groups, became fully aware of their continued marginalization and leaders' use of legated structures to de jure and de facto expand their political power. The Niger Delta crisis can be invoked once more to illustrate a different angle of the nature and impacts of the conflict on national stability. The Niger Delta impasse dates back to decolonization, and consolidation of the belief in a social model based on the capacity of the majority ethnic group's leadership to integrate minority groups into the process of development (Nnoli 1978/1995). The Wenninck Commission failed to meet the expectations of the minorities for autonomy through political decentralization within the federal structure (Osaghae 1998). As the political fate of the minorities was deferred to the future and constitutional amendments, their fortunes became effectively dependent on the majority ethnic group's leadership volition.

The Niger Delta area, inhabited as it is by minority groups, has since independence witnessed frequent social crises with untold consequences for the polity of Nigeria. Central to the struggle is the demand for inclusiveness in political processes and outcomes. Importantly, the response by the political executive leadership has been ambivalent, and protests as a result have degenerated into armed struggle (Edylyne 2001).

As Table 5.8 shows, the Hausa-Fulani ethnic fusion in the North tops the list of participants in core political executive offices since decolonization. The regional circularity of the elite in political executive offices has been the outcome of reproduction and alternation, mostly between the mainstream ethnic groups. Circularity of ethnic groups in the political executive elite class is most visible between the Yoruba and Ibo leaderships. These two have quite often 'locked horns' to occupy the second position in the ethnic hierarchy of the political executive elite. In the period under study, ethnic power rivalry has implied the struggle to consolidate a vertical order of power formation rather than concern for an egalitarian power structure that supports regime openness and inclusiveness.

Executive level representation of minority groups has been undermined throughout the various regime changes, each of which witnessed significant economic resource transformations based on oil revenue re-

ceipts. Participation of the various ethnic groups can be understood more clearly if we draw on the dominant-dominated dichotomy based on the numeric and geographic distribution of the groups. The coincidence of ethnicity with regional and religious identities and the capacity of regional leaders to transform these identities into effective power blocs helps to explain the persistence of dominant power relations that sometimes collapse into what Salih (2000) has called 'majoritarian tyranny' that erodes minority rights.

Policies for curbing inequalities at the regional level, such as the 'Federal Character' principle which was designed to correct skewed admissions in the public service, have been transformed by the ruling elite into ethnic resources for political power and domination at the centre. One practical implication of this outcome of institutional development has been the increased centralization of state power with ethnicity, religion and regional origin standing out as political instruments for achieving such pursuits. The military regimes presented no significant rupture except that they outlawed by decrees the institutions that had guided ethnic mandates, but they did not in practice 'extinguish ethnic rooted regional forces' (Mustapha 2004: 258–259).

The cabinet setup, as a result, has reflected the character of the highest executive leader and the effects of power relations and dominance in the polity. Nigerians appear to have been guided by such political symbols as ethnic identity such that any ethnic group may be believed to have its own fair or sometimes abusive share of the national wealth. All that is needed is an ethnic member in the influential cabinet, either as president, vice president or minister. So, as Dike (1999) observed, status symbols may be the stimuli for support rather than rejection of a non-performing political executive.

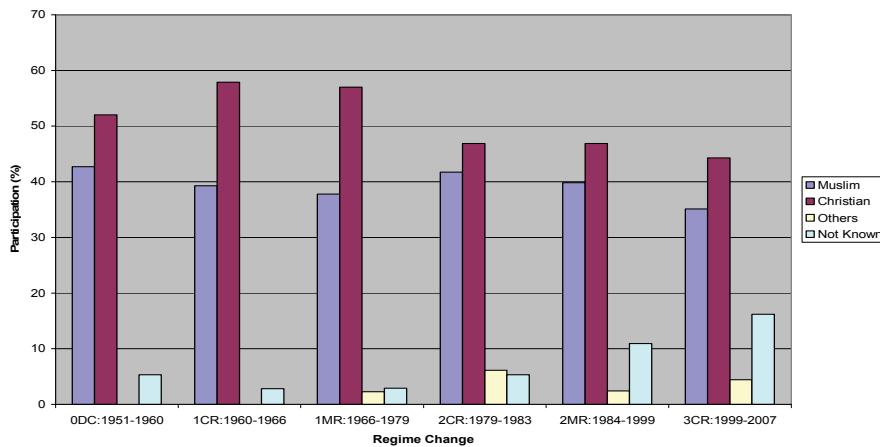
A similar analogy applies to the military regime and its leadership. Despite the manifest rejection of ethnic approaches to politics, the military still deployed ethnicity to feign the aggregation of social demands. As noted in Chapter 4, the military leadership at the national level used the executive institution and military style discretion to expand the federated state structure and dilute ethnic biases in politics. At least in part, such expansion either turned into gerrymandering schemes or had little significance for political efficacy. That is, apart from any contribution towards keeping Nigeria out of the precipice (see Suberu 2006), military leaderships have not effectively changed the power structure. In short,

they failed to alter the manipulation of ethno-religious and regional symbols for political and economic purposes.

### 5.3.4 Circularity by Religious Background

Religious affiliations of cabinet members show a prevalence of Christians over Muslims (Figure 5.9). However, religion is not strictly associated with regional and ethnic differences. Analysts usually portray religion as an influential political power resource manifest through the manipulation of its inherent ethno-regional symbols in Nigeria. Religion is often considered, especially in the North, as a uniting force along ethnic lines. Again, especially in the North where the majority is of Muslim faith, the idea of religious affiliation is sometimes applied to denote an egalitarian orientation and unity in opposition to the belief systems and practices of southerners.

**Figure 5.9**  
*Participation by Religious Affiliations and Regime (%)*



**Source:** Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Bienen (1986) warned that this idea could be misleading. Consider that certain other ethnic groups, such as some of the Yorubas, who have

a similar Muslim background to most northerners, in fact vote for Christian candidates from the same ethnic group in the West against the northern candidates (with which they share common religious origin). Moreover, egalitarianism in the North has a special reservation for Muslim women, who are usually less educated than women in the south-west Yoruba lands who have greater social leverage (Biennen 1986). The outcome is the aggravation of obstacles to gender equality and political representation of women at both the regional and the national levels, which is manifested through women's weak competitiveness and inclusiveness in the political elite stratum. So, education, gender and religion in the Nigerian context can be said to be related in a way that impacts elite composition according to the tolerance level of the traditional belief system in each region.

A fuller understanding of the practical influence of religion must be based on the interaction of the trio of ethnicity, religion and regional origin. During colonial times and the decolonization period, these three jointly served the political elite as a bulwark for opposing colonial impositions and promoting the liberation movement and for the achievement of democracy in Nigeria. As argued by James Coleman (1994), tribal associations constituted the nodal points of leadership formation and the rise to political elite status through tribally supported political parties (pp. 15–19). Also, Nnoli's (1995) studies reveal ethnicity as the pivot of the nationalist movement that cumulated in independence in 1960.

Nigeria's key political executive leaders have engaged religion and region in the various institutional processes that have marked political changes through constitution drafting committees (CDCs), political party formation and pressure groups. For instance, ethnic power blocs in CDCs have sought to institutionalize non-secular institutions such as Sharia courts and processes of dispensing justice based on religious doctrines. In so doing, the political elite has deployed ethnicity, religion and region to enhance the divisive nature of politics. The important point here is that ethnic symbols are exposed to politics more through their manipulation by political leadership than through the organic nature of identities without politicization.

It was noted earlier that the kinetic force of political parties and leadership since colonial times and the decolonization period derives from ethnic associations which have played a crucial political role. In the ensuing period various leaders have manipulated ethnicity and region as in-

struments for accessing power through ethnic votes. All of the four except one elected executive leader (prime minister and presidents) hailed from the majority ethnic North. Meanwhile, six military heads of state, or two-thirds, were Hausa-Fulani, save General Y. Gowon who originated from a minority northern ethnic group. General Ironsi with his short-lived tenure and Obasanjo who ascended to the position as stand-in for General M. Mohammed (who was assassinated 16 February 1976) appear atypical in this regard.

Ultimately, leaders in the various regimes have been observed as using ethnicity as the basis for recruitment into the cabinet. For example, during Obasanjo's presidential tenure (1999–2007), more Yoruba members, i.e. representatives of his ethnic group, ascended to political executive offices. Indeed, a look at the ethnic origins of members of the political executive during Obasanjo's dual mandate (1999–2007) (see Figure 5.6) reveal the selective nature of his cabinet appointments. The ethnically lopsided appointments occurred despite Obasanjo being accused by his own ethnic group members of encamping with a different political party (the People's Democratic Party) than the one supported by his tribe's people and other groups in the South (the Alliance for Democracy). Natufe (2000: online) decried Obasanjo's negligence of his supporters (mainly minority groups) in the South who had voted for him en masse.

It is clear from the data on the regional, ethnic and religious background of Nigeria's core political executive since decolonization that communal features combined with other power resources are a significant means for accessing and retaining political power. However, as this pathway to political power is marked by conflictive relations between the majority and minority, it is at odds with the institutional pathway to democratic development. The idea of open competition and inclusion in democratic government is not necessarily to eliminate conflict but to neutralize the destructive effects of opposition (Bratton and de Walle 1997). Hence, democratic procedures seek to preserve conflicting elements. Rather than destruction, the aim is to enhance their mutual development.

The persistence of ethnically based politics through all political regimes experimented with so far in post-colonial Nigeria can be shown to be associated with weak elite attitudes towards social demands and democratic governance. To the extent that leaders are perceived as fraudulent, intoned Kalu (2004), invoking ethnic identity is perceived as the

most effective strategy for making demands on the state. A perception of leaders as suspect increases the elite's capacity to manipulate ethnic differences to achieve their goals (*ibid.*). Awa (1999) similarly observed that 'the various forms of political chicanery, such as electoral frauds and deceptive speeches that mark the severe departure from democratic government, can hinder the national psyche that becomes accustomed and amenable to instability as a way of life' (pp. 129–142). Ethnic politics then generates a vicious circle because it denies state autonomy while driving people to look to ethnic patterns of relations as normal, despite extant formal structures. The impression of normalcy amid the political executive elite's disrespect for formal procedures encourages business as usual, reinforcing the elite leaders' incentive for fraud and their distortion of the demands placed on the political system.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the circulation and characteristic composition of the core political executive elite based on data from running records related to the socio-cultural and communal backgrounds of the Nigerian core political executive. Since colonial rule, and despite many structural changes, a recurrent pattern of socio-cultural and communal origins has delimited the outlook of the holders of high political offices. Elite recurrences implies circulation or reproduction in key political executive offices and roles, such as prime minister, president, vice president, minister and junta members, of people with similar personal backgrounds and representing comparable groups in society.

Specific common social class and status symbols were observed to be associated with selectivity, exclusivity, inequality, continuity and social marginalization in political executive processes amid changes in political regime, economic resources and size of government revenue since political independence. Data shows that socially important groups and sectors like the working class and unionized labour, minorities, students, women's groups and peasants are under-represented or suffer outright exclusion from the power structure. The analyses thus revealed the importance of a variety of resources in promoting elite ascension to political executive offices and their retention of power at the national level of government.

Firstly, common social class background was observed not only as instrumental for gaining access to political offices in the national government but also as a resource for managing office longevity. Aging and patriarchal patterns of social relationships have been translated into instruments for manipulating political office-holding and prolonging office tenure while making the latter appear more socially acceptable. Similarly, people from certain professional and educational backgrounds have featured more prominently and persistently than others in the political executive power structure since colonial rule. Apart from the active presence of members of the military and legal, business and civil service professions, university professors have reinforced the bureaucratic and technocratic machinery, enhancing continuity in first-order cabinet and junta positions. Meanwhile, the traders, farmers, students and trade union leaders who represent the masses of Nigeria are not represented – directly or indirectly.

Secondly, and contrary to liberal-pluralist expectations, communal origin, specified by ethnic, religious and regional resources, constitutes a peculiarly common elite feature and has been the basis for developing certain political attitudes. The majority ethnic group elites manipulate regional and religious symbols, converting these to political resources (votes or support) with which to claim political power and roles at the national level of government. The conversion of communal symbols to political uses, despite regulations to the contrary in the formal institutional realm, reveals the adoption of informal power as a self-serving instrument, i.e. for perpetuation of the elite in political executive offices. It implies that despite the heterogeneous outlook of the political executive elite derived from socio-cultural, traditional, economic, military and political resources, its composition is the product of recirculation instead of renewal. Elite recirculation in political executive offices points more to a ruling class than to strategic elite power and a functional role structure. Chapter 6 explores the composite character of the core political executive further through its social networks, which in turn are propelled by political party organizations, patronage and corruptive exchanges.

# 6

## Network Foundations of Elite Character and Continuity in Core Political Executive Offices

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter deepens the analysis of the social mechanisms underlying ascendance to and retention of political executive offices by the Nigerian elite. The chapter explores how the political elite use informal networks to retain political executive power and roles beyond but not necessarily above social background connections. It examines the antecedent and active role of political parties, which generally are considered crucial formal organizations for strengthening democratic institutions. In Nigeria, political parties are used to forge the informal networks that support power-holding in political executive positions. Here, political parties and their leaderships are found to exercise a paradoxical role, as they constitute the backdrop for devising the informal social networks that coordinate the activities and interests of the political class supporters of the national government elite. The guiding questions are three: (1) What are the historical and dynamic relationships between political parties, party leaderships and the informal networks underlying the occupancies of political executive offices since colonial rule? (2) How has the conduct of the political executive elite affected the political system? (3) What explains the permanence, i.e. continuity in political executive offices, of upper echelon government leaders in the years since colonial rule?

### 6.2 Political Parties as Antecedents and Central to Elite Networks

Considering that the Nigerian polity has often been analysed from the perspective of ethnic politics, power-sharing or state centrality models,



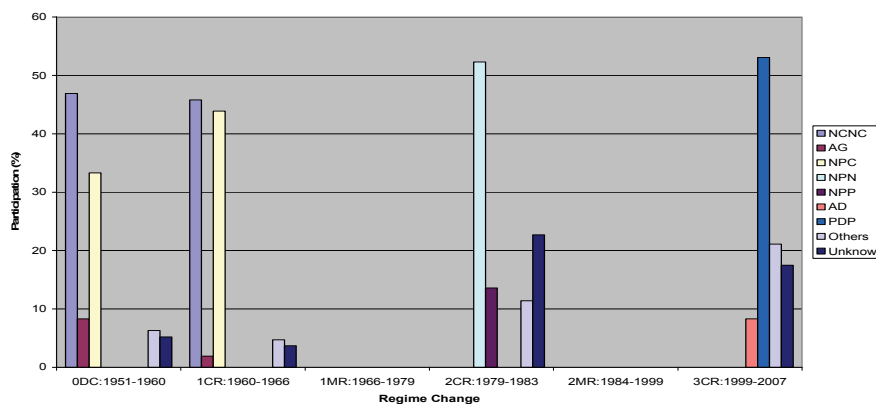
attention here is focused on the social networks that have emerged and grown in favour of elite continuity in political executive offices. Sociological theories assert that networks derive from broader society. Networks can thus be seen as providing the historically and socially administered autonomy and manoeuvrability of the Nigerian political executive elite. The elite emerge from their social backgrounds with little coordination; networks provide the functional dynamics through which diverse political actors, institutions, organizations and events cohere and collude for particular purposes. Thus, networks serve as the informal fora through which temporally and spatially disconnected Nigerian elite leaders stick together to further special interests rather than public interests.

The emergence and use of social networks for fostering access to and retention of political offices in Nigeria can be traced to party organizations, coalitions, cleavages, patronage and corrupt practices of the Nigerian elite. These enable the elite to capitalize on the direct and formal link between political parties and state control to informally and selectively allot political and economic advantages through network arrangements. Informality permits the operation of elite networks, regardless of political regime type. That is, both civilian and military regimes and rulers in Nigeria have resorted to networks to legitimate their rule while enhancing special interests. The presidency and organizations such as political parties, which are linked to the national executive government, the wider elite networks and social backgrounds, serve as recruitment agencies for political executive actors. At the same time they deploy formal mechanisms such as the constitution to rationalize the role of the presidency in allocating political offices.

The purpose served by political parties in the wider Nigerian context transcends their customary role as formally organized groups which act within public institutional frameworks as interest intermediaries between state and society. In other words, the parties function as a network to accumulate resources and to articulate information between member actors, enhancing membership cohesion and formulating and effectively applying legal and physical sanctions against the masses. This network represents the interests of the Nigerian political class. The issue remains how and why an undesired political class endures over and above important structural changes aimed at enhancing a socially meaningful transformation of the political executive elite.

Figure 6.1 shows the different political parties from which elite members have accessed political executive offices since decolonization. Even under military regimes, political parties appeared as instruments of manipulation for enhancing continuity and preventing significant changes in the power and role composition of the political executive elite. A singularly notable historical fact about the Nigerian political elite class – and one that operates in support of its ‘all-round excellence’ and ‘overall superiority’, as analytically critiqued by Keller (1966/1991) – is that constitutional reform has without exception been a product of colonial and decolonization initiatives or military inventiveness. That is, at no time has any crucial constitutional reform been initiated and managed by Nigerian civilians.

**Figure 6.1**  
*Participation by Political Party Affiliations and Regime (%)*  
(1951-2007)



Source: Classified data from various editions of Year Books, *Who is Who* in Nigeria and Africa South of the Sahara

Except the initial changes in the power and role composition of the highest executive offices (president and prime minister), acknowledged in Chapter 4, civilian politicians have simply and conveniently adapted to pre-existing political structures without making any substantive effort to alter militarily initiated provisions to a more civic disposition. For exam-

ple, increased concentration of power and roles in the office of the presidency has remained so since 1979, when the constitution promulgated by the military-led government of Major General Obasanjo came into effect. Apart from the power to appoint ministers based on the so-called 'Federal Character' principle and to dismiss any of them for diverse motives, the presidency has reserved its power to sanction the number and operation of political parties through the, again presidentially appointed, Independent Electoral Commission.

The political parties that emerged in the decolonization period pre-date the 1946 Richardson Constitution, which inaugurated political liberalization. During decolonization (ODC: 1951–1960), three major parties consolidated their power status along ethnic lines. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) was founded in 1944 by Herbert Macaulay, with Macaulay as its first leader and Nnamdi Azikiwe as general secretary. With the death of Macaulay in 1946, Azikiwe took over the party's leadership (Sklar 1963, Azikiwe 1970/2000, Bassey 2009). The NCNC was created from two parties: (1) the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), also formed by Macaulay, established on 24 June 1923 and reclusively based in Lagos and (2) the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) founded by professional and educated elites in 1934 (Dudley 1982, Sklar 1963). Sklar (1963) showed that the NYM emerged with a relevant political discourse aimed at contradicting the British educational policy that tended to favour 'vocational rather than liberal education', as the group considered the latter more useful for political liberation (pp. 48–49).

Unlike the other major parties, the NCNC was not purely ethnically based at first, even though its development was eventually marked by ethnic and professional schisms before it evolved into an ethnic party, mainly of eastern Ibo extraction and leadership. Another political party that emerged at this time was 'Action Group' (AG), an offshoot of a Yoruba cultural association known as Egbe Omo Oduduwa or 'Association of the Children of Oduduwa'. Dudley (1982) noted that the Action Group's initial platform of ethnic orientation towards politics did not receive wide support, i.e. beyond regional articulation, so the party revised its slogan to 'improving life quality and enhancing inclusive freedom' (p. 47). However, this reversal did not extricate or significantly alter the ethnic rooting of the party.

The third major and most influential party to appear was the Nigerian People's Congress (NPC), officially founded in 1951 (see Sklar 1963). It was an offshoot of two cultural associations: the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) or 'Association of the Peoples of the North' and Jam'iyyar Jaman Arewa or 'Northern Nigerian Congress'. Its foremost leader was Ahmadu Bello, the Sultan of Sokoto. Another smaller party, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), was created as a masses-oriented party by Aminu Kano, who left the NPC after dubbing it 'pro-establishment' (Dudley 1982, see also Omotola 2009). There were other smaller parties as well, usually referred to as nanny parties and having limited political clout. Dudley (1982) observed that the nanny parties functioned as instruments for aggregating local support for the bigger parties. The larger parties were so called because their roots, affiliations and organization relied on the majority ethnic groupings. Thus, they could reckon on a greater followership and organizational resources including influential ethnic notables and reputable leaders at the sub-national and national levels. Nanny parties with ethno-regional and religious notables thus constituted crucial cross-cutting network nodes.

### 6.2.1 Network Orientation of Political Parties Towards State Power

A striking feature of the formation and peculiar evolution of political parties in Nigeria has been their capacity to defy formal institutional prerogatives. The parties retained their typical structure and leadership orientation after the failed experiences with multiparty systems in the First Republic, or as Dode (2010) put it, the 'failure of parties in their responsibility to contribute to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria's first Republic' (p. 191). The political parties that emerged from the various institutional changes overtly aimed to achieve organizational autonomy vis-à-vis the state, and sub-national groups carried over organizational patterns and identities from the undesired past. The similarity with the organizations of the past demonstrates the persistence in the Nigerian polity of 'historically developed and utilized exchange opportunities' that permit the 'exchange relations' and sharing of 'valued resources' described by Cook et al. (1983: 277) as characteristic of social networks.

Analysts unanimously recall and reiterate that the political parties that emerged during the Second Republic were 'reincarnations' of the old ones in the First Republic (Izah 2003: 6, Dode 2010: 191, cf Yaqub

2002). That is, while the formation of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) took to Action Group foundations and adopted a leadership orientation towards the West, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) emulated their NCNC and NPC origin with centralized directives from the East and North, respectively. The current Third Republic is governed by the three largest parties – the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). That last political party, the PDP, has won all of the general elections since 1999 and its members have featured in most political executive offices (Figure 6.1).

Agbaje and Adejumobi's (2006) portrayal of the characteristic appearances of the three political parties as carbon copies of the erstwhile parties is worth reproducing fully:

The PDP turned out to be a party for retired military and police officers, buccaneer capitalists, old politicians of the conservative NPN stock and former technocrats. The AD is led by remnants of the UPN, who are mostly ethnic ideologues and erstwhile pro-democracy activists, all of whom make claims to the Obafemi Awolowo political dynasty. The ANPP on the other hand, has its origins and support base in the north; it relies on ethnic and religious symbols for political support, and has in its leadership apologists of the Abacha regime, retired soldiers and religious irredentists (Agbaje and Adejumobi 2006: 35).

The above quotation warrants deeper reflection, particularly regarding the implications for elite continuity in political power and roles without significant social changes in power and role compositions. First, despite constitutional changes and nationally appearing identities and claims, the resurgent political parties are not workably disconnected from their past bearings, not only in terms of ethnic elite notables but also with respect to ethnic and network-based support. Secondly, the old political parties metamorphosed only in name, i.e. without significant changes to their identities and orientations. Consequently, the entry point to the national executive power structure has been disproportionately and continually more open to select members of the larger ethnic groups than to others in society. This is borne out by the data on political affiliations.

Most importantly, political parties occupy a central position based on their significant role as network nodes interlacing the formal and informal realms of political power. Political parties serve to integrate, select

and co-opt clients through patronage-based allocations of political offices to various party members and benefactors. True to network characteristics, political parties are not just fundamental in the network nodes, but they are the resurgent products of a shared past that guarantees elite continuity in political executive power and roles. In both civilian and military regimes, political parties have been recognized as instrumental for manipulating power, co-opting resourceful elite individuals and groups and promoting continuity in executive offices. Because the post-colonial political parties in Nigeria persist (especially those officially and continually acclaimed victorious) under elections that have often been considered fraudulent, and as no opposition party ever won general elections, a plausible deduction is that the leading political parties have been operating within a frail institutional framework.

### 6.2.2 Party Regimes and Patronage-Oriented Leadership Networks

The US power structure and network, as described by Mills (1956/2000), draws its strength from the dynamics of the capitalist system. The Nigerian power structure, based on its historical and dynamic pattern at the national executive level, relies on patronage exchanges. Gunther and Diamond (2003) noted that with the expansion of suffrage and under pressure for socio-economic development, political parties sympathetic with the local notable parties dissolved into more elaborate patron-client parties. Clientele parties are said to bring together for particular purposes notables ranging from traditional leaders to rising professional or economic elite individuals or groups spread across geographical, functional or personalized circles of support (*ibid.*).

In practice, combining the data on the professional (Table 5.2) and ethnic (Figure 5.6) composition of the core political executive elite reveals an interesting outline. That is, the main political parties in Nigerian post-colonial history have aggregated over time the human resources necessary for promoting a purposeful power structure which, in the national political executive sphere, looks after the interests of the political class. Hence, a particular paradox besets the highest level of the Nigerian power structure. Stated differently, highly rated professionals and ethnic notables use socially valued resources to harness state power and roles for particularistic purposes. For example, elections have continually been rigged in Nigeria since colonial rule, and no opposition party has ever

won. Jibril Ibrahim lamented the attitude of the political elite towards elections, which are often captured by what he calls ‘moneybags’ that operate to ‘exclude ordinary people with character and ideological commitments’ (Ibrahim 2005: 20). Indeed, the repeatedly decried lack of ideological underpinnings of the Nigerian political parties (Omotola 2009) is not just inimical to the development of political parties; in fact, it leads the parties to play a role contradictory to that commonly expected of political parties and leadership in a democratic system. In the Nigerian polity, ideological weaknesses reinforce the informal networks that operate by eroding the foundations of formal political institutions and outcomes.

Patronage exchanges are designed to support access to political power and its retention, especially within the powerful national executive government through the operation of congress parties. Another contradictory aspect of the institutional use of political power and roles to foster particular elite interests is the fact that, from the First Republic onwards, state resources have remained the funding source for elite preferences. Thus, a close relationship can be established between patronage exchanges, power composition and elite leadership continuity in political executive offices. As long as the political elite patrons satisfy their clients, continuity in power and roles is secured. Dudley (1982) described the iniquitous pattern of patronage dealings in terms of the particularistic regularities of the motivations and expectations from both sides involved in the exchanges:

For the Nigerian political elite, politics involves not the conciliation of competing demands (...) but the extraction of resources which can be used to satisfy elite demands and to buy political support. The political relationship is essentially a relation between patrons and clients, in which the patron survives only to the extent that he satisfies the demand of his clients, and clients give their support in so far as the patron delivers the goods. The ability to extract, and therefore to deliver, is of course directly related to the extent of control over the instrumentalities of government (Dudley 1982: 63).

Patron-client parties that are linked to the personality of powerful individuals, as typical in Nigeria, are weak organizations which pay little or no attention to the programmatic or ideological content of politics (Gunther and Diamond 2003). Gunther and Diamond (*ibid.*) further noted that, unlike most masses-based parties, patron-client parties lack a pro-

gramme that is either incremental or transformative for all of society. This reasoning corroborates Ibrahim's (2005) observation that elections in Nigeria marginalize those with ideological loyalties. The weakness of patron-client political institutions attracts political personalities that analysts refer to as 'strongmen' (Bratton and de Walle 1997, Diamond 2008). The presence of strongmen in the political class and political executive facilitates the distribution of political offices amongst network members, while embodying the informal network's larger potential. A key feature of the network is revealed, which is its flexibility, not in terms of social inclusiveness but its capacity to extend power and roles for self-serving purposes through a limited number of actors spread across regional and ethnic boundaries. Put differently, elite networks, served by political institutions such as the political parties in Nigeria, are associated with co-optation.

Amongst other illustrative cases, the ascension to power of Nigeria's current chief executive indicates not only interlocking forms of office-holding but also selective co-optation. Goodluck Jonathan was the state governor of the oil-rich Niger Delta minority zone before he was unexpectedly selected as the PDP's vice presidential candidate for the 2007 national elections. Worthy of mention is that the historically troubled and crisis-torn Niger Delta has in the past destabilized the nation's wobbly political institutions even further. The depredation of oil infrastructure and kidnapping of foreign oil company employees have provoked shortfalls in the mainstay of government revenue (oil proceeds) and, by extension, in the patronage sources of leadership support.

It was in the course of intermittent negotiations between the Nigerian government and Niger Delta leaders that Goodluck Jonathan became the PDP's vice presidential candidate (the running mate of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua) on the recommendation of the incumbent chief executive President Olusegun Obasanjo. This peculiar recruitment process gained added significance when President Umaru Yar'Adua took ill and subsequently died, resulting in the elevation of Jonathan to the topmost executive office. It validates Serkeris' (2010) argument about the need for weak leadership agencies to selectively co-opt strong elite clients to support the government or political regime.

A significant aspect of patron-client relationships is that they are based on selective exchanges through which the power structure attracts and accommodates special interests to sustain oligarchic power. The pa-



tron-client power structure is therefore evasive of social roles, public preferences and political institutions. Patron-client patterns in the Nigerian polity represent 'ambivalent positions towards the more formalized structure of the society' (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984: 2). Patron-client relations operate within informal power spheres and between select groups of likeminded people. They therefore divert attention away from formal political processes in ways that limit and weaken political interactions while hindering performance at the global (national) level of governance.

Lessons from the neo-patrimonial model provide insights about the concentration of political power at the federal government level, especially in the presidency, as this office is associated with the authority to overrule decisions without representation of social interests. According to neo-patrimonial analysts, the presidential institution in Africa, including Nigeria, uses clientele networks to distribute state resources in the form of public sector jobs and social benefits such as licenses, contracts and projects (Jackson and Roseberg 1994: 291–322; see also Forrest 1994: 260–296). The use of state resources by the political elite occupants of government offices in Nigeria is therefore designed to maintain patronage networks and to guarantee 'legitimacy', 'stability' and 'predictability', as concluded by Bratton and de Walle (1997: 61–63).

Because patron-client networks show the characteristics of selectivity, i.e. of participants and beneficiaries in an enclosed circle of interactions, they contain certain elements of informal, flexible networks – or 'flex nets' which in Wendel's (2009) interpretation are elusive in character. That is, flex nets, and as applied in Nigeria, attract, coalesce and centralize elite resources such as organizational capacity and bureaucratic information, regarding e.g. the distribution of political offices and the award of contract jobs, especially at the political party level. These resources permit interpersonal mingling, avoidance of outsiders, mutual sharing of benefits and support for continued terms in political offices. Orji (2008) described a linear-like movement of political parties from regional, during the First Republic (1963–1966), to national compositions in the Second Republic (1979–1983). However, the cumulatively informal and flex net characteristics displayed by the Nigerian elite in political circles suggest a non-linear movement to network parties. That is, political parties appear to be settling for a self-contained and concentrated pattern of association vis-à-vis society at large.

### 6.2.3 Party Coalitions, Cleavages and Continuities Through Elections

The role of political parties as a crucial foothold for ascent to as well as retention and transfer of political executive offices in Nigeria cannot be fully appreciated without reference to elections, party coalitions and cleavages. These have been the offshoot of elite manoeuvres through network nodes and interactions. Both elections and appointments to political executive offices form the means for political parties to express their organizational capacities and retain certain types of support. Political parties and elections in Nigeria can inform who eventually succeeds who and by what means in government – i.e. the extent to which elite circulation occurs through electoral institutions and patterns of recruitment into the core political elite. Indeed, political parties provide the institutional and organizational resources described by the critical elitists (Mills 1956/2000, Mann 1991) and new institutionalists (North 1991, Moe 2002) as the ‘currency’ for realizing power and interests. Elections are used by incumbent elites for self-perpetuation and to facilitate access to political offices for likeminded elite counterparts. They also provide a means to attenuate risks by bringing likeminded or amiable actors into the political establishment.

Three general elections were held during the decolonization period: in 1951, 1954 and 1959. The outcomes of these elections revealed the very powerful influence of regional parties rooted in the majority ethnic groups. These rose to fill key cabinet positions based on coalitions and counter-coalitions. The 1951 regional elections produced an experimental all-parties coalition cabinet without outright winners and losers. In contrast, the elections of January 1955 led to a cabinet formed by two dominant parties: the NPC, which actually won more seats, and the NCNC, which with 23 seats defeated the Action Group with its 18 seats. The win enabled the NCNC to nominate ministers for the western region where the Action Group was rooted.

On 30 August 1957, a corner was turned in the composition and leadership of the national executive when Mallam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became Nigeria’s first prime minister and head of government. He was the leader of the Northern People’s Congress in the Federal Parliament appointed by the then Governor General, Sir James Robertson. In addition to the ‘godfather’ role played by the departing colonial masters, ethnic morphology arbitrated in favour of Balewa’s vertically inter-

locking positions. The northern region, where Balewa's party had its roots, had a significantly greater allotment of seats (174 or 54%) than the East (73 or 23%) and West (62 or 19%). This advantage greatly boosted Balewa's leadership, enabling him to climb from local representative to finance minister and ultimately to prime minister. The ethnic ties between Tafawa Balewa and Sir Ahmadu Bello who abdicated the national premiership for the regional one (Dudley 1982) served to promote the cohesiveness of northern elite leaders.

As Figure 6.1 reveals, the number of NPC representatives in the cabinet rose significantly from 33.3% during decolonization to 43.9% under the post-independence regime (1CR: 1960–1966). There was then a fall in NCNC representation, although the party remained influential because of its alliance with the NPC, which continued through independence, and the fact that the NCNC had won a considerable number of seats in the West, the heartland of the Action Group (see Sklar 1966).

The Action Group's participation declined further in the First Republic government, when the NPC-NCNC coalition pushed the Action Group to the opposition camp. Ige (1995) suggested that the coalition had a weak moral basis because of the skewed power structure that resulted from exclusion of the Action Group and its many followers, who were now forced into the opposition. The issue here is less the alternative role of opposition that the Action Group found itself in than the relationship between government and opposition. As a political idea, and in practice, the political opposition is designed to deepen the institutionalization of democracy through elections and alternated leadership successions. Most importantly, the political arrangements between the NPC and NCNC portray the outreach of the network that at the national level became conveniently circumscribed to inter-regional and inter-ethnic political exchanges.

It could be suggested that instead of falling back to a weaker position, the NPC decided to pre-empt an alliance between the Action Group and the NCNC by co-opting NCNC elite leaders within the emergent patronage network (Dudley 1982). A detailed review of accounts in the literature suggests that the network's objective included the manipulation of policy agendas for its own purposes (Nwabueze 1973, Nwaolise 1995). The alliance that defined the network, for example, used executive power and roles to exercise a firm control over policy agendas, redirecting the voting behaviour of parliamentarians towards the approval of

bills mostly sponsored by the political executive and curtailing civil liberties from below (Nwabueze 1973). The political alliances sustained through networks since the First Republic have hinged on the co-optation of party notables, leadership personalities and patronage exchanges (Diamond 1993, Gunther and Diamond 2003, Kurfi 2005, Vaughan 1995, 2005).

To start with, the operation of the political parties that has taken part in elections since political independence in Nigeria have been hinged less on liberal-pluralist precepts than on what Diamond and Gunther (2003) referred to as elite and ethnic-based organizations. These organizations, according to these analysts, use state resources to perpetuate the interests of their founders and special supporters rather than representing ethnic group preferences or those of the masses through government authority and roles (*ibid.*). They further showed that congress parties are a special brand of ethnic-based party, reliant on party notables and personalities across different ethnic groups through which patronage exchanges are accomplished (*ibid.*). Thus, the necessity to attain and maintain political executive offices that permit the distribution of state resources through patronage networks leads to the formation of congress parties.

As Kurfi (2005) noted, during the 1951 elections in the North, district heads enjoined village heads to handpick 'notables' rather than elect persons in the village to represent the party at the district electoral college (pp. 2–3). The NPC was the first regional party practically patterned on alliances with 'local elites', i.e. local notables sharing the traditional and religious values of the North (Whitaker, Jr. 1977). For example, local structures based on elite notables allowed the party to seek support directly from 'village and district heads, Native Authority (NA) functionaries and the chiefs without [concern] about developing a mass party organ to woo the mass' (Dudley 1966: 358). Hierarchic values of command and obedience without debate or contestation (i.e. the free political interactions expected by liberal pluralists) thus served to guarantee the acquiescence of the masses while legitimating political executive power and leadership roles at the national level of government.

Moreover, the creation and recreation of convenient party regimes contributed to reproduce election results by selecting elite members to protect the continuity pattern. Power collusive party regimes in Nigeria have usually been the product of manipulations by chief executives and their allies seeking self-perpetuation in political offices. Time in office

equates with experience in using state resources to buy off the election of supporters (Biennen and de Walle 1989). Barely had the alliance between the NPC and NCNC waned during the first government mandate of the First Republic before the two parties clung to different political coalitions most of which involved splinter party groups.

Failed attempts at ‘consolidation elections’ (i.e. beyond first mandate elections), observed Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006), have made open regimes ‘more difficult to manage in Nigeria’ (p. 37). These authors observed that ‘the interests and forces at stake in the consolidation process are more diverse, with some of them controlling the election machinery’ (ibid.). They cited the failed 1964–65 elections and the 1983–84 general elections as evidence of attempts by the ruling party ‘to contrive and monopolize the electoral space, engineer grand electoral fraud, as well as hatch a deliberate plot to move the process towards a one party dominant democratic order that favours the latter’ (ibid.). This scenario prevailed in the 1983 elections, during which ‘the NPN which hitherto controlled seven of the nineteen states wanted to expand its dominion from seven to twelve states through electoral fraud’ (ibid.). Traditional rulers played a leading role in the ample coalitions that for the first time implied a wider network of individuals and groups.

#### 6.2.4 Role of Traditional Rulers in Elections and Elite Continuities

Despite the fact that traditional rulers were deprived of political authority in the post-colonial period, they have continued informally to play an active role in the networks that shape winning political parties. They are not just network members; they also influence the direction taken by elections and appointments to political executive offices. Vaughan documented the initiation in the first military regime period (1MR: 1966–1979) of a network-oriented campaign to consolidate power before the 1978–79 general elections by northern traditional rulers during the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of Sir Abubakar III as Sultan of Sokoto and Sarkin Musulmi, Muslim leader of northern Nigeria. The joint occasion was reported as having triggered a national movement and alliance between the emirs and influential northern civil servants and businesspersons. That alliance produced the NPN party, which became the most extensive nationally, for the first time permeating all regional and ethnic boundaries to co-opt ‘southern allies from Igbo, Yoruba, Edo and Efik minority groups’ (Vaughan 2005: 125).

Most importantly, the network twice backed the election as executive president of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (in 1979 and 1983) (from the northern region) with as vice president Alex Ekwueme (a business tycoon from the eastern region), and it was also central in the appointment to cabinet positions of various individuals, many of whom were selected by traditional chiefs (see Vaughan 1995, 2005). On the other hand, Vaughan (2005) noted, traditional rulers awarded chieftaincy titles to leading political executives. Shagari himself took on the title of 'turaken' in the Sultan's court. This chain of mutual exchanges also conferred the informal role of government advisers to the emirs. In other words, while patronage exchanges in Nigeria perhaps changed their face and outreach, the political goal of power accumulation through elections that reproduced an unaccountable cadre of executive elite leaders remained the same.

At the height of a military style campaign to install a two-party system and extend office-holding through a rather façade-like civilian regime, Ibrahim Babangida, a northerner who was the first to assume the title of military president of Nigeria (1985–1993), was noted as having adopted a chieftaincy title in the eastern Igbo zone (Adjaiye and Misawa 2006). Similarly, Adjaiye and Misawa (2006: 5) reported that both President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku (1999–2007) held chieftaincy titles and exercised 'significant influence' over social groups and those others who accept or simply respect the authority of honorary chieftains. The presidential aspirant of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) party in 1999, Olu Falae, who was a bureaucrat and former federal minister also held a chieftaincy title which he often highlighted during his failed bid to preside over the nation's highest executive position.

The participation of traditional institutions in the post-colonial Nigerian polity demonstrates not simply the power brokerage role by traditional rulers, but also the influence that traditional chiefs have exercised on the composition of the political executive and the political system through informal network systems. Firstly, the use of chiefs and chieftaincy titles for electoral and political purposes has characterized both civilian and military regimes. Despite coercive removals, deprivation and weakening of chieftaincy rights following colonial rule, traditional titles were increasingly assumed by civilian and military rulers (Adjaye and Musava 2006). In so doing, these rulers appropriated the deeper and localized contacts of the traditional power-holders to accumulate power, roles and support at the formal level of political office-holding.

Secondly, and because traditional rulers advised elites on recruitment into political executive offices, new elite members tended to have historical ties with informal powers at the traditional level. As such, they usually represented not only their interests as these converged with those of the political class but also the interests of their traditional rule mentors.

Thirdly, the assumption of traditional titles by occupants of key political executive offices implies office ‘interlocking’ and role interchangeability, reinforcing the power and continuity of traditional leaders’ influence on formal political offices. Interchangeability of roles enhances the informal (flex) network characteristic of elite interactions. That is, elite network members can assume political executive office from a particular elite background, e.g. in the military, as a bureaucrat or professor, and at the same time hold a chieftaincy title. Overlapping roles boost the potential of the network to create, recreate and alter e.g. elite admission criteria and to use rules for particular purposes without significant social challenge. This enhances elusiveness, i.e. avoidance of accountability.

### **6.2.5 Ruling Parties’ Fixation on Political Power and Continuity**

Similar to the situation in past civilian and even military regimes, the ruling party in the current Third Republic (1999–2007) has built on past experiences, patronage-based networks and cross-cutting political articulations realized through intra-party cohesion and schism. Since 1999, the PDP has remained the ruling party (Agbaje 2006). Figure 6.1 confirms the superior hold on executive power and roles of PDP members, who have featured prominently in political executive offices since 1999. Although the PDP has not relied on inter-party coalitions to win elections, its internal organization and electoral scheming has remained the by-product of broad intra-party coalitions, cleavages, manipulation and office interlocking.

Thus, the PDP by itself constitutes a large network of political personalities and organizations whose origins cut across similar ethno-regional, religious and professional groups that are coordinated and controlled by the presidency. Often, the chief government executive stands as party chairperson, implying a horizontal type of office interlocking that supports power concentration and continuity in political executive offices. It is on record that former President Retired General Olu

Obasanjo not only exhausted the eight-year constitutionally permitted mandate but also sought to extend his term of office through a third mandate that was overtly rejected by the National Assembly.

The PDP's internal organization, especially the form and outcome of its primary elections, is illustrative of personalization of power and 'god-father' politics. The process combines patronage exchanges with alliances, cleavages and presidential impositions propelled by a historical and dynamic clientele network reliant on state resources and strongman leadership for its survival. To start with, the 1999 post-military regime election of Obasanjo as the nation's second executive president derived from an informal consensus scheme that re-inaugurated the so-called 'presidential zoning system'. Moreover, PDP primaries since 1999 have been characterized by notorious network processes from which only candidates favoured and patronized by the chief executive emerge victorious.

The most frequently noted example of high-handed manipulation of intra-party elections occurred during the December 2006 PDP primaries from which Yar'Adua emerged as the presidential candidate with Goodluck Jonathan as his running mate. Analyses of the primaries reveal that President Obasanjo schemed hard to confirm the candidacy of Yar'Adua, allegedly using powerful government machineries such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to vilify disfavoured candidates. According to newspapers and research reports, many candidates for the primaries in the network mysteriously withdrew their candidacies as the EFCC levelled on them one accusation or another (Alifa 2008, Menas 2006). As Menas (2006) reports, leaders such as Rivers State Governor Peter Odili, who nonetheless opted to support Yar'Adua's challenger (former national security adviser Aliyu Mohammed Gusau) and his supporters, faced the wrath of the EFCC.

In short, intra-party primaries demonstrate the interplay between informal power-holders and formal institutional authority-holders in the Nigerian polity. Firstly, intra-party primaries were designed to appoint selected, co-opted and unrepresentative national executive elite members willing to operate in support of powerful government patrons. Secondly, intra-party primaries since 1999 have displayed the converging nature of the social networks that have backed political executive office-holding since the post-colonial period. The network's range in the First Republic



was primarily sub-national, due to its highly circumscribed ethno-regional identity and membership.

During the Second Republic, despite the fact that the winning political alliance was limited to two major parties, party identities and memberships assumed a more national than ethno-regional scope. Thus, for the first time a much broader national network of elite members emerged to represent the political class. In the Third Republic, the extant network has been broadly composed of a single ruling party. Furthermore, no opposition party has ever won elections. Despite expansion of the number of contending parties, the network remains cohesive and inflexible.

### **6.3 Political Executive Elite Attitudes Towards the Political System**

#### **6.3.1 Commitment to Political Accountability**

The liberal-pluralist idea of political accountability is based on coherent elite values and interests being maintained in correspondence with social preferences and, by extension, the political system. Such coherence requires an open and inclusive governance regime as well as, and above all, adaptation and adoption of attitudes and behaviours, especially by political executives, to institutional and public scrutiny. The expectation is that structural and institutional changes will redirect the attitudes of political executive office-holders towards public choices. Put differently, selfish orientations, such as patronage, corruption and rent-seeking in state office, which may emerge to weaken the response capacity of office-holders, will be subjected to institutional constraints. Social measures such as formal education are encouraged, as they are expected to promote enlightenment and tolerance of opposition groups, which are needed to maintain the ideals and operatives of equality and accountability.

Chapter 5 observed that members of the political executive elite share *inter alia* a common educational background through graduate and post-graduate schooling experiences and qualifications acquired at home and abroad. So far the current chapter has focused on the role of political parties and their respective leaderships in the formation and character of core political institutions and the elite leadership itself. The clear point has been that patronage exchanges typify the relationship between politi-

cal parties, executive level state institutions and members of society. Patronage exchanges in the Nigerian polity operate side by side with corrupt practices. Jointly they impinge on any prospect for accountability in the political system. Similar to patronage exchanges, corruption involves the practice of exchanging public services for private gains. These exchanges derive from informal power relations within government agencies, influenced by private interests.

Critical elite analysts emphasize the role of the political elite's special interests in collusion with the power of economic agents which the elites require to curtail the social agents' capacity for converting *de jure* (formal) political rights and liberty into realistic freedom (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008). The Nigerian polity has witnessed a pattern of power concentration among a few elite individuals and groups resorting to the centralization of political authority in the federal government. Centralized political authority has served to maintain firm control over the distribution of state resources through informal means such as patronage and corruption. Thus, despite structural changes, *inter alia* including a widening of political rights and civil liberties since colonial times, elite collusion continues to be a major linchpin of political executive elite power. This collusion has depredated state coffers, especially through corrupt practices, hindered the institutionalization of political liberties and civil rights and provoked social instability.

Table 6.1 and Figure 6.2 show that at least since 2000 corruption has emerged as a social and political problem in the Nigerian public service. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (TI-CPI) scores Nigeria between 5 and 0, a range that indicates countries with the most corrupt public sector. Between 5 (representing the borderline) and the maximum index value of 10 are the least corrupt countries. Because corruption in Nigeria operates through informal relationships between similar individuals with common interests mainly realized with the use of state resources, it can be considered an aspect of the elite's attitude towards political power retention. Dishonest social interactions motivated by financial gain and power retention aims are selective, exclusive and serve to evade the institutional oversight characteristic of accountability. Such interactions promote the occupancy of political offices for self-enrichment at the expense of social development. Corruption thus weakens the very basis of horizontal accountability, *i.e.* that of civil society-level inquiry.

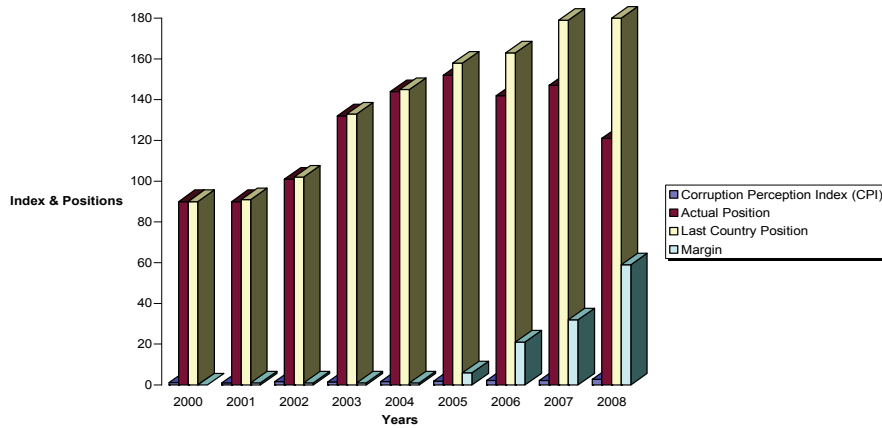
**Table 6.1**  
*Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and Nigeria's Scores, 2000-2008*

Year	CPI	Actual Country Position (Nigeria)*	Last Country M Position (Other)**	Margin for Nigeria (Last - Actual)***
2000	1.2	90	90	0
2001	1.0	90	91	1
2002	1.6	101	102	1
2003	1.4	132	133	1
2004	1.6	144	145	1
2005	1.9	152	158	6
2006	2.2	142	163	21
2007	2.2	147	179	32
2008	2.7	121	180	59

*Source:* Compiled from yearly reports of Transparency International at [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)  
 \*Indicates Nigeria's CPI ranking amongst the surveyed countries. \*\*Shows the last country's CPI ranking amongst the surveyed countries. \*\*\*Demonstrates the difference between the last ranked country and Nigeria's position - note that significant marginal increases occurred as more countries were added

Corruption has a pervasive effect on political accountability because it reduces the social orientation of policies. Such reduction occurs, e.g. by diverting away (for particular purposes) public investments in education, which are needed to enlighten citizens and shore up voters' capacity to holdback errant political leaders. In Nigeria, corruption impinges in various ways on the political elite's moral force and the capacity of citizens to assign responsibilities and act on such assignments. Firstly, it diminishes the political executives' ability to formally protect voting rights and enhance service delivery as a typical function of the agency of the political leadership. For example, national security institutions, such as the police, considered crucial to regime consolidation through law enforcement and realization of public policies to protect the poor (Alemika 2003), become either too permissive or too selective in service delivery.

**Figure 6.2**  
*Corruption Perception Index (CPI) and Positions of Nigeria since 2000*



**Source:** compiled from yearly reports of Transparency International at [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)  
**Obs:** last column on 'margin' calculated by author. Note that significant marginal increases occurred as more countries were added.

The two extremes (permissiveness and selectivity) constrain the public's chance to protest against exclusion or to seek justice in courts. A report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) about Nigerian police operations since the inception of the current civilian regime in 1999 denounced the degradation, torture and assassination of suspects in ways reminiscent of the military regime period (HRW 2005). The Nigerian police is said to be under-resourced, with its staff numbering about 325,000 set against an overall population of over 140 million. Moreover, many of the nation's police force resides in densely populated urban areas where they are exposed to bribery (Hills 2008). However, the problem of police culture goes beyond issues of understaffing, under-resourcing and the colonial legacy, to include a weak orientation towards public security. The Nigerian police are considered to represent the ruling elite more than the Nigerian people (ibid.). Little or nothing can be expected in terms of a coherent police culture geared towards protecting electoral and post-electoral rights without adaptation of the political culture of the elite occupants of executive government positions to standards of social consent and a moral sense of responsibility (as the CPI indicates, Table 6.1).

In practically all elections since independence, citizens were denied basic rights to autonomous choice. Strongmen, financial ‘godfathers’ and street thugs have taken control of electoral processes and outcomes (Olarinmoye 2008, Diamond 2008). Predatory elite formation has trampled on human rights and hindered property rights. Deficiencies in property rights discourage current and potential investors at home and abroad. Negative outcomes such as abused rights and closed opportunities are observable in the Nigerian polity and also pre-empt good governance during and after elections.

### **6.3.2 Commitment to Political Rights and Civil Liberties**

In practically all Nigerian political regimes since independence, formal or informal arrangements, or a combination of both, have been emphasized and used to fill appointed political offices. For example, achievement criteria have been combined with ascription in the form of a quota system and ‘Federal Character’ to compose the cabinet in different governments (see Orji 2008). Consequently, class and status symbols have been blended to determine which individuals would be included as members of the core political executive. The institutionalization of ascription criteria in the post-colonial Nigerian polity was in theory intended to reinforce openness and social inclusiveness in decisive political processes through implementation of the consociational approach to democracy (see Lipjhart 1977, 1991). In practice, the outcome emphasized by elite and political system analysts has been the quality rather than quantity of elite composition (Prewitt and Stone 1976, Verba 2003, Zinnecker 2009) in key political executive offices. Moreover, the point is not whether inequality is inherent or historical in Nigerian society, but the extent to which the different recruitment criteria (achievement or ascription or a combination of these) have contributed to attenuate the heinous effects of inequality on the polity and improve the quality of the political system. Liberal-pluralist thinking asserts equality as a basic principle of participation in political processes, the idea being that inequalities will be counteracted through the opening of ‘participatory opportunities’ (Crompton 1998: 6). Insight into how the openings of social opportunities are engineered as circumstances (political regimes and economic resources) change is crucial for understanding the real condition of Nigeria’s political system. To Verba (2003), ‘the political systems’ potential to turn weaker or stronger depends less on who participates in terms of the

amount than the representation of interests' (pp. 663–679). Thus, quantitative changes in representation are less important than the dual processes of cross-cutting social participation and substantive representation of interests based on equal weighting of preferences. The operation of equal preferences involves the 'meta-activities and processes' of the state and requires from the 'national executive' the activation of pertinent political institutions for 'protecting human rights' (Hyden et al. 2004: 12–19) and, by extension, the political system (Verba 2003).

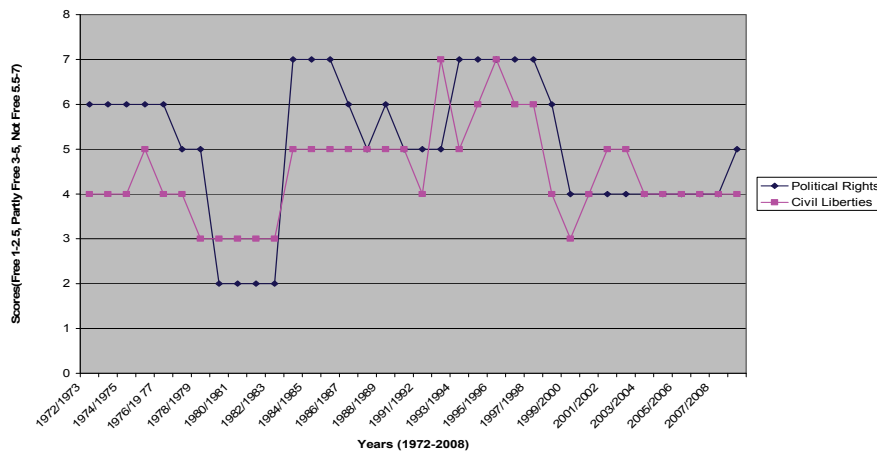
As discussed in Chapter 5 and in the preceding sections of the current chapter, institutions such as political parties and the executive branch (which essentially includes the presidency and cabinet) have been historically dominated by individuals and groups with similar characteristics in Nigeria. This domination has implied the opening of opportunities, such as the right to participate in political processes and outcomes, to few individuals or groups. Opportunities in the polity have thus been restricted for others or, as the critical elitists identify them, the masses. Regime dynamics in Nigeria, especially under the observed alternation between authoritarian (military) and democratic rules, have implied tension more than substantive guarantees of political rights and civil liberties. In particular, the fact that major aspects of these political regimes have played out within the coercive framework of military rule has left in place oppressive patterns of conducting state business in Nigeria.

Political regimes, as Munck (1996) recognized, are characterized by both procedural and operational patterns that complement each other in terms of processes and the expected outcomes of the system. A political system is affected not only by the nature of the rules governing political conduct (including that of the elites). The political system is also, and very importantly, shaped by how rules are managed (Fishman 1990, Hyden et al. 2004) to produce the expected outcomes, e.g. in terms of adequately guaranteed rights of participation. This is especially valid when the political system is called 'democracy'.

Freedom House data (Figure 6.2) on regime trajectories and outcomes in Nigeria since 1972 may not reveal all of the relevant features and operations of the various governance regimes. However, in the absence of more meaningful indicators, the Freedom House data provide the basis of this study's measured levels of regime openness and social participation based on respect for political rights and liberties. Between 1972 and 1978, the Nigerian political system was graded 'partially free'

with political rights rated between 5 and 6 and civil liberties scoring between 3 and 4 points. Freedom House is said to neither assume positions nor stipulate policies or political strategies that should be followed. Between 1972 and 1978 in Nigeria, the political regime was dictatorial under various military governments. As the analysis in this study is not focused on the political systems themselves but on the constraining factors of those systems, the Freedom House indicators can be interpreted as portraying a political regime offering limited political rights and social mobility during this time.

**Figure 6.2**  
*Freedom House Rating of Democracy in Nigeria (1972-2008)*



Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw/FIWallScores.xls>

The curtailed character of the 1972–1978 political regime, as indicated by the Freedom House data, corroborates Gill’s (2000) assertion that the ‘ruling authorities’ under ‘limited’ or ‘partial’ liberalization does not necessarily relinquish control but only make convenient concessions to certain groups or persons while maintaining the right to intervene and reverse unfavourable outcomes (p. 48). Gill (ibid.) used the concept of ‘limited liberalization’ to make distinctions about democratization, as the total opening of the polity and inclusion with tolerance of opposition

groups. In fact, the Nigerian system seems to be lacking in democratization. In the 1970s post-civil war context, particularly during the second half of the decade (during Obasanjo's first headship of the Nigerian state), there was little opening of the polity before the Second Republic was officially inaugurated on 1 October 1979. Moreover, even the processes guiding that transition, such as the Constitution Drafting Committee; have been described as elite dominated (Ademolokun 1985).

Despite the fact that this period witnessed the intervention of the military elite in politics and despite the coercive nature of political attitudes and behaviour, a certain measure of public mobilization was allowed with guided participation, even though the system remained closed in terms of political contestation and tolerance to opposition. One concession was the expansion of the number of federated states, designed to diffuse power and promote grassroots governance. The recourse to incorporation or co-optation was a product of experience, as the short-lived military government of Aguiyi Ironsi (1966) had been criticized for paying insufficient attention to grassroots contacts either through traditional rulers or civilian politicians (Ige 1995). Subsequent rulers resorted to incorporation or co-optation to enhance grassroots contacts and acquiescence with the purpose of legitimating the regime's proposals and actions. For example, Gowon's government (1966–1975) called upon regionally acclaimed politicians who had served in the defunct First Republic (1963–1966) to assume cabinet positions (Nwaolise 1995).

With the reintroduction of democratic rule (1979–1983), Freedom House scores improved considerably: the score for political rights rose to 2 and that for civil liberties to 3, and the political regime was characterized as 'free'. This ranking implies that political contestation and participation were (overtly) encouraged. The Freedom House evaluation, however, failed to note the rampant rent-seeking, patronage and corruptive exchanges. These errant practices vigorously re-emerged and increasingly came to characterize political attitudes and behaviour towards the exercise of state authority. Apart from the role of devious or wilful political games, the political elite deployed coalitions to avoid social inclusion and the equitable distribution of state resources. The coalitions strengthened the informal networks used by the elite to exclude outsider participation. When Shagari's government was overthrown in December 1983, the reasons given by the coup plotters related to ineptitude, nepotism and corruption (Joseph 1995).



According to political system analysts, especially those concerned about 'effective democracy', rampant coercive and corruptive practices erode various qualities of plural democracy, such as the workings of social group autonomy and the inclusiveness that produces the qualitative representation of interests (Wetzels and Inglehart 2008). Notwithstanding, political and financial corruption remained common in Nigeria. Consistent lack of tolerance for autonomous and inoffensive political activities reflected government restrictions on civil liberties. Such restrictions translated into highly oppressive military tactics such as the Odi Village Massacre of 1999 that generated terror among the local population because 'a group of youths were reported to have abducted six policemen and eventually killed them' (Chijoke 2009: 53). Such military tactics are known to lead to strategies of intimidation, often followed by violence aimed at instilling fear and forcing compliance.

In the process, political rights are grossly violated instead of preserved. Dahl's association of widespread violence in the state and society with 'strain on any political system' (1995: 78–79) applies to the Nigerian system based on the trampling of political liberties such as freedom of expression and social voice and demonstrated in the Odi Massacre. Although Nigeria repeatedly holds elections and popular votes (presumably implying indirect participation and interest representation in government), these lack legitimacy, despite government recognition of their outcomes. In fact, elections characterized by violence, rigging and 'godfather' politics serve only to further undermine social trust.

The repeated evaluation of political regimes as 'partially free' has reinforced a trendy but unclear pattern of hybridism, analytically defined as combining authoritarian and democratic elements (see Zinnecker 2009). There has been particular mention and speculation about the uncertainties surrounding the current development direction of democracy in Nigeria (Diamond 2004). The observed complexities and elusiveness of the Nigerian system tend to deter bold approaches and scrutiny. Moreover, there is the tendency to qualify the African experience of democracy (including Nigeria's) as distinct or following a typical but as yet undefined form (Udogu 1997). The greater puzzle is perhaps the large swings in government systems since independence in Nigeria, as these have been marked not only by ambiguities but also confusing adjectives such as 'diarchy' (Akinola 1996), 'competitive authoritarianism' (Diamond 2002, Levinsky and Way 2006) and other less clear labels. From the initial de-

mocratic experience (1960–1966) many rough paths were trailed to attain the Freedom House status of ‘free’ regime (1979–1983). However, instead of continuity along the democratic path, the system suffered a radical retreat from liberalization and participation. Repression was reasserted with varying levels of military dictatorship before returning to constitutional government in the current Third Republic.

Instabilities and disrespect of political rights and civil liberties has clearly imperilled the initially foreseen advance of democracy towards respect for basic rights and liberties. The failure to extend rights in substantive terms to the masses and the use of violence to maintain exclusion and generate social instability has certainly hindered the workings of the political system. A political system can be derailed when leaders adopt duality, establishing freedom and equality for some and denying them to others (Dahl 1971). The Niger Delta crisis, although confounded with resource struggle (see Douglas et al. 2003: 1–11), has an undertone of historically negated rights (Osaghae 1998), inequality and lack of voice – or simply denial of social choice. The preferences of citizens, defined ‘as the political ordering of values and interests’, go unfulfilled. Based on the high incidence of change in political regime and the obvious social instability in post-colonial Nigeria, a significant connection appears to exist between the characteristics of the core political executive and weak responses to social demands, such as for political rights and civil liberties.

#### **6.4 Basis of Continuity in Political Executive Power and Roles**

Since colonial rule, elite continuity in political executive power and roles has operated through the recirculation in political offices of individuals and groups with similar background characteristics. This section examines the association between elite recurrence in political executive offices and background similarity. Firstly, the mere fact that members of the political executive elite of Nigeria stem from a similar background (sex, age cohort, profession, majority ethnic origin and political party affinity), as observed, does not necessarily explain power and role continuities in the polity. Secondly, as a critical elite analyst insisted, the essence of political elite composition does not simply derive from competition but also from

'changes in values' (Lane 1997: 855–874) manifested over time and space.

Put differently, the cumulative pursuit of political and economic power has represented the motivation for the elite to continually 'cling' to political executive offices since colonial rule. The elite's pursuit of high political offices is not only implicit in the historical composition of the upper echelons of government but also is reflected in the volatilities of coalitions, alliances and political institutions operated mainly by the political class. Instead of expected changes in ideas or values, the characteristic composition of the political executive has been associated with typical attitudes and behaviour (rent-seeking, patronage, corruption, coercion, 'godfather' politics and trampling of rights of freedom and equality) aimed at maintaining the status quo.

It is not always convenient to place political and economic interests in different boxes, that is, to separate political interests from economic ones. However, an analytical distinction is conceivable based on the attitudes and behaviour most exhibited by the Nigerian political elite towards political office-holding and, by extension, the political system. Data and literature analysis points to the existence of a self-interested, self-serving and self-restorative elite composition whose concerns converge first and foremost at the uppermost point of political power. These elite attributes in Nigeria are mirrored in the power structure of the political executive sphere of government. In other words, elite preferences since colonial rule have assumed a timeless pattern of special interests realized by using state resources and placing a premium on political power as the foremost objective.

Cohen's (1972) affirmations about the pursuit of political power as a means of sustaining acquired privileges and allaying fears of social insecurity sheds further light on the accumulation of political power as a causal factor. This analyst demonstrated that social and material insecurities rather than resource scarcity have induced a permanent quest for political power among three segments of the upper class: (1) the colonially privileged wealthy class, (2) educated affluent professionals and (3) wealth-seekers (*ibid.*). Apart from representing an overriding and constant means for securing economic power and thwarting social mobility, political interests became conducive to a recurrent elite hold on political executive offices.

Similarly, Graf's (1988) allusion to a common awareness and affinity of interests amongst Nigerian political elites supports the association made by Cohen (1972) between elite ambitions and political power accumulation in the executive government sphere. Graf (1988) also showed elites' initial preference for political power as providing a basis for achieving financial power. Moreover, this supporting view asserts state power in Nigeria as an ultimate elite pursuit through which all other interests are fulfilled. Graf (*ibid.*) highlighted the common awareness of the Nigerian political elite as manifesting through the 'muted idea that mutual service' or 'utility to each other' is required and that 'self-enriching must be carried on, through the political machinery, to the detriment of the broad majority' (p. 20). Thus, the inability to break away from the colonial past, if not disinterest in doing so, plus the avid quest for political power as a means to maintain economic wealth and social prestige, has reproduced the dual pronged cohesive forces of self-enrichment and mutual benefit.

Cohen's (1972) insecurity thesis and Graf's (1988) notion of common awareness highlight, respectively, the psychological and political factors that support the claim about the invalidity of Marxist and liberal-pluralist assumptions in Nigeria. Insecurity and the phobia of group domination (Horowitz 1985, see also Orji 2008) define the psychological factors that, in turn, drive political attitudes and behaviour such as patronage, corruptive practices and nepotism by the political executive elite. These forms of elite interactions and actions towards political objects serve to secure material accumulation, to enhance prestige and to promote continuity in political executive offices. Weber's (1968) insight that relative class and status positions can define political affiliations, such as membership in political parties, which can be used to improve life chances under state power, applies in the Nigeria case.

It follows from the above empirical analysis that the dual goals of power and wealth accumulation are achieved through the manipulation of socio-cultural symbols, patronage and convenient political party regimes. This latter set serves as a mechanism for articulating the social networks that support political executive office-holding. The facile manipulation of ethnic symbols occurs mainly through communal socialization. Informal interactive mechanisms are reinforced by formal education and bureaucratic organizations that serve a recurrent power structure while rendering the masses acquiescent. Elite recurrence in po-

litical executive offices cumulates in a socially unresponsive and irresponsible upper government composition. The usurpation of political and economic power and the associated prestige represents the common interest attribute of the Nigerian political elite, which continuously works to obtain and retain political executive might.

Political power assumes precedence over economic interest, because the acquisition of the latter depends primarily on the former: ascent to and retention of state power to control the distribution of public resources. Unlike the linear Marxist approach to power inequality, which is based on disparity among economic classes, and distinct from the liberal-pluralist postulations about social class autonomies founded on educational and professional differentiation, in Nigeria access to and retention of political and economic power depends on social factors such as ethno-regional background, religion, education and profession with network dynamics. Through political party organizations, patronage exchanges and coercion, the elite convert different and valued social backgrounds into network functions for supporting office-holding and securing the narrow interests of the political class. Above all, the vested interests of the political class play a fundamental part in political power and role continuities.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The mutual interests of the Nigerian political class that supports political executive elite office-holders have been served more by contingent situations and choices than by formal processes. According to O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), mutual benefit as a function of 'social preferences' is fundamental to elite agreements on political power allocation in specific situations with 'uncertain outcomes' (p. 59). By either natural means or manipulation, the Nigerian political class' choice to retain political power through mutual agreement has been demonstrated in various situations of uncertainty – such as the post-colonial transition (1951–1960), the first military coup (1966), civil war (1967–1970), the sharing of power and state revenues, especially the revolutionary oil revenues (early 1970s), the annulment of presidential elections leading to social upheaval (1993) and a series of transition imbroglios. Yet, elite mutual agreement, in the case of Nigeria, is marked by a particular paradox. Instead of societal preferences, i.e. contrary to O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) assertion,

elite mutual agreement has often emerged as the function of selective social (i.e. the political class) preferences.

Very recent examples illustrate the way the Nigerian political class has seized opportunities arising from prevailing circumstances to make decisive agreements about continuity in political power and roles at the executive government level. Tensions between ethno-regional political actors have been escalating amid street bombings and ethnic clashes. Central to these episodes is the forthcoming presidential elections scheduled for early 2011. Many fear that an ethno-regional conflict could develop and lead into civil war. Goodluck Jonathan, who was elevated in 2010 from the vice presidency to the chief executive position, is reportedly taking part in the election on the ruling party's platform. Certain northern elite leaders have been aggrieved that Jonathan's candidacy will deny the North its zoning chance to continue the headship of the presidency which Yar'Adua (also of the North) was unable to complete due to natural causes – illness and death.

Not so surprisingly, i.e. in business as usual, the incumbent Jonathan from the minority zone won the PDP primary elections as the presidential candidate. Tom Burgis, a Financial Times editor, reported the outcome of the elections, noting the following:

That Mr. Jonathan has been able to consolidate after his ascension from the vice presidency is partly an indication that fierce claims of ethnic loyalty can be jumped by the political class's determination to maintain control (Burgis 2011: online).

Burgis further quoted Nasir el-Rufai, a former federal minister and reputed reformer, as saying, 'Nigerian elites have far more in common to protect than there are ethnic and religious differences. They can do all this senseless brinkmanship, but at [the] last minute they will make a deal' (ibid.). Such situations define a peculiar form of political interactions by political actors, with various implications. Firstly, intra- and inter-party coalitions and alliances remain instrumental for enacting power-wielding agreements. Secondly, and most importantly, stifled growth of the political system has been the cost of maintaining the special and lofty interests of the political class supporters of those who hold political executive offices.

Thus, and unless the strong sense of common interest – similar to an 'iron cast union' – is weakened, the Nigerian political class will continue

to capitalize on situations of turbulence, overlook their differences and insist on wielding political power to the detriment of true reform and consequently social development.

# 7

## Conclusions

### 7.1 Outline of the Research Framework

This study centred on the core executive elite of the Nigerian polity, which since independence has been plagued by instability in governance regimes. The various chapters examined the recruitment, composition and character of holders of upper echelon positions in the federal government. A key question was how the historical and dynamic composition of the core political executive elite has affected the political system of Nigeria, considering the major political transformations recorded in the post-colonial period. The study's main objective was to analyse the composition of the core political executive elite, its periodic circulation and its typical characteristics as political regimes and economic resources changed over time. To guide the empirical analysis, four specific objectives were formulated.

The first specific objective entailed accounting for the major changes in the political system since decolonization, based on relevant constitutional and institutional sources. Thus, the study began by seeking to describe the historical aspects of regime changes in Nigeria as a prelude to understanding the setting in which the political elite emerged and has operated with lasting effects on the political system. The second objective was to analyse the social background of members of the core political executive elite. This involved using specific features, such as social class and communal origins, to ascertain the composition of the elite in key political executive offices as government regimes and economic resources changed over time. The third objective was to examine the composite nature of the core political executive elite based on social network characteristics. The fourth and final specific objective introduced an ex-



planatory component into the analysis, in an attempt to clarify elite continuities in political executive offices.

The study demonstrated elite continuity in political executive power and roles despite structural modifications in the form of changes in political regimes and economic resources since independence. It further argued that historically entrenched social dysfunction and self-serving interests rather than public service interests have driven the elite's endeavour to gain and retain political power. The observed patterns of political elite composition, character and circulation have significantly curtailed the democratic tenets of open contestation, cooperation, participation and consistency in observance of the rule of law. In particular, respect for political liberties and civil rights, has been seriously constrained by the elite's historically entrenched and dynamically persistent special interests. The interests served are the common ones shared by the political class to which the core political elite at the national level is mostly responsible.

A critical elite theoretical and analytical framework was employed for analysing elite circulation, composition and character in political executive offices in post-colonial Nigeria. This approach challenged the adequacy of the Marxist and liberal-pluralist perspectives for understanding elite composition and its extended impact on the operation of the political system in Nigeria. The Marxist-oriented idea that the characteristics and composition of the elite in political offices derive uniquely from their relation to economic property overlooks the variety of socio-cultural, communal and political resources from which social networks are deployed as part of an enduring power structure. In Nigeria, the ruling power structure is able to endure beyond the threshold at which Marxists believe a radical change in the extant social system is inevitable and will lead to the inauguration of socialism, which is to say, a classless society.

At the other extreme, the liberal-pluralist assumption of power dispersal in open systems neglects the emergence, development and persistence of status symbols and elite attitudes that obstruct structural changes aimed at transforming the power structure by rendering it more egalitarian. In particular, this study questioned the validity of the view of the elite usually applied by liberal pluralists, who highlight the importance of a heterogeneous elite formation opposed to the continuity of the ruling class. The latter elite formation is believed to derive its power

from birthright, such as accumulated wealth and a shared tradition of attendance at 'ivy league' colleges and other similarly reputable elite educational institutions.

The current study was inspired by the influential scholarly position promulgated mainly by critical elite theorists. These scholars challenge the radical or, as Mills (1956/2000) coined it, 'overloaded' assumptions of Marxist scholars and the simplicity (minimalism) of the pluralists' postulations about power dispersal based on autonomous social groups acting in concert with a neutral state. The analytical framework adopted in this study drew significantly from power elite assumptions. Power elite proponents assume a rigid power structure with an integrated elite hierarchy that socializes the elite even under circumstances of structural change.

However, the framework applied here represents an adapted and improved version of the triumvirate power elite classification. Instead of simply following the economic, military and political power elite classification developed by Mills (1956/2000), this study advanced a quintuplicate power elite framework for analysing the Nigerian case. The Nigerian elite occupants of government executive offices were assumed to derive their power resources not necessarily from economic factors (as the Marxists would claim) or autonomous groups (as per the liberal-pluralists) but from a variety of historically and dynamically formed social backgrounds and network pacts. This theoretical advance is based on the typical nature of the Nigerian polity interweaved with the communal (mainly ethnic) and civic identities used (and sometimes abused) by the elite to harness political power and seek legitimacy.

Different from the triumvirate elite power structure, the Nigerian political executive membership and permanence was assumed to be linked to a network of elite and sub-elite types that integrates the political class. This elite typology was understood as deriving from the varied pattern of social class and communal status backgrounds of Nigeria. As the product of historical and dynamic forces acting from different and uncoordinated social backgrounds, the Nigerian quintuplicate elite configuration relies on a social network to achieve its interests. This network is comprised of the traditional, socio-cultural, military, economic and political elites. Also, leading ethno-regionally based political parties and leadership personalities are associated with the emergence and development of the social

network through which political actors ascend to and retain political executive offices over time and space.

## 7.2 Findings

### 7.2.1 Similar Social Background

A major finding of the research is that amid changing circumstances since decolonization, there has been a great deal of continuity in power and roles of the core political elite in Nigeria. In other words, as observed from the social background of the core political executive since independence, there has been no major shift in high political office-holders' characteristics. Participation in key political executive offices has been limited to individuals and groups of similar social class and status background, most notably, men of a similar age group. Extended stays in political offices, i.e. the office longevity often claimed by the political executives to consolidate proclaimed social policies, were not observed to be a factor limiting the fierce and sometimes bloody disputes over political succession since colonial rule.

Perhaps surprisingly, continued occupancies of political executive offices have not had a cathartic effect – i.e. they have not alleviated the disorderly pattern of access to and retention of political executive power and roles. By extension, continuity in political executive power and roles has not halted or significantly attenuated the tensions, fierce struggles and bloody disputes for political power that continue to hinder social participation, opposition and the strengthening of the political system.

This study empirically examined the role of communal factors such as ethnicity, religion and regional origin in circulation of the political elite in office. The data confirmed the earlier assertion about a skewed and conformist elite outlook with unequal access to power resources at the central, federal level of government. The Nigerian political elite has been historically retrograde, with ethno-regional oligarchic tendencies. Achievement criteria especially that related to high educational qualifications and professional standards are blended with ascription attributes operated through such devices as the 'Federal Character' principle, informal networks and durable patron-client relationships. Manipulated ethnic orientation towards political objectives has tended to define the power balance in favour of majority ethnic leadership.

Analysis of ethno-regional distribution and ethnic morphology (structure, size and resources) showed that the majority ethnic group leaders in each region were disproportionately represented in political executive offices. Based on regional attributes, the northern region has historically dominated the political process in terms of its relatively high influence on values and the distribution of rewards. More northern leaders have been chief executive, especially under military regimes. Indeed, northern elite leaders have appropriated most of the instruments of military regimes to centralize power and distribute social resources in ways that have generated 'ethnic' conflicts (Suberu 2007: 452). The implication is that minority ethnic groups and their leaderships are either relegated to second order and least influential cabinet positions or, more often, marginalized in the mainstream political power establishment.

Findings about recruitment patterns confirm the unequal ethnic influence in political elite circulation. Data on ethnic, regional and religious identities show that recruitment is significantly associated with the ethnic origin of the incumbent chief executive's power and authority. Power retention is most clearly visible in the North, mainly because this region's elite leaders have most frequently occupied the chief executive position. Also following the ethnic morphology pattern of access to and maintenance of state power, the Hausa-Fulani ethnic fusion has dominated political executive offices since colonial rule. Northern influence has been clearer than that of the other regions, not only at the presidential level but also at the level of the most important ministerial portfolios, such as finance and central banking, planning and petroleum plus the position of chief economic adviser.

The ethnic pecking order (hierarchical leadership pattern based on ethnic affinity, appeal and support) associated with ethno-regional lineage was reconfirmed during Obasanjo's (1999–2007) recent government. Data showed that while the participation of northerners in first-order cabinet positions declined, inclusion of Yorubas increased during Obasanjo's civilian government. Data on religious affiliation (see Figure 5.9) shows a fairly even distribution of Christian and Muslim members of the national government. So, contrary to Weberian expectations of the reduced importance of ethnic emotional appeals as a result of modernization, Nigeria's ethnic Who's Who remains significant, at least in the occupancy of political executive offices.

### 7.2.2 Interactive Devices Ensure Political Executive Continuities

The analysis of the Nigerian elite's use of political parties to perpetuate a self-serving power network reveals not only cohesiveness but also the dynamic character of the core political executive elite. Data about affiliations to political parties and participation in political executive offices show that access to and retention of political executive power and roles are mostly shared among the members of the majority ethno-regionally based political parties. That is, elite participation in political executive offices through political party affiliation has been linearly and hierarchically based on ethnic morphology and network interactions. In particular, considering that no opposition party has ever won elections since colonial rule, it follows that the emergence and development of informal networks hinge on winning parties whose identities and memberships can be traced back to the structure and leadership of the majority ethnic groups. Moreover, the ethnic patterns of political party identities and memberships since colonial rule indicate that a self-serving elite network in Nigeria is associated with the resources and personalities of particular political parties and their leadership.

Elite dynamics were thus found to operate by harnessing informal network resources to formal institutions, such as political parties and the presidency. The powers and roles of this latter are converted through patronage, co-optation and corruption to protect special interests and avoid answerability. The historical trailing of political party formations to ethno-regional morphology revealed how the Nigerian political elite capitalize on informal-formal institutions to enact influential social networks. These latter are used for linking likeminded allies and social actors who support the continued membership of select individuals in political executive offices. Before the change to the presidential system in 1979, political alliances were observed only at the sub-national level between two ethno-regional parties. The 1979 constitution obliged political parties by law to establish offices in at least two-thirds of the states and local government units. Parties were also prohibited from using ethnic insignias for campaign purposes. Without losing their ethnic roots and identities, the historically winning parties sought to diffuse their memberships through broader, nationally reaching alliances that culminated in social networks. Three deductions can be made in relation to the alliances and cleavages that shaped these nationally integrated networks.

Firstly, elite power networks are associated more with quantitative changes than with qualitative changes in the composition of the political executive elite. Social support then increasingly became hinged on informal social networks. That is, admission to political executive offices was made more selective by dynamic modes of patronage (cross-cutting and selective distribution of second-order cabinet positions and passive approval by the chief executive of ‘godfather’ politics) with the co-optation of key social leaders and manipulation of political processes without significant renewals in composition.

Secondly, the formation of political alliances in post-colonial Nigeria was initially (i.e. during the independence government, 1960–1965) observed as the sequel of electoral outcomes. However, from the second general election (1965) and the aborted second mandate of the First Republic (1966), the Nigerian political elite increasingly capitalized on past experiences to engage in intra- or inter-party alliances before elections. The interesting point derives not simply from the temporal differences of political alliances but from their purposive contents. Although the post-electoral intra-party and sub-national alliances indulged in patronage exchanges (see Dudley 1982), they were also inclined to ensure a stable and viable executive government. Balewa was the prime minister and co-leader of the NPC who initiated and led the bi-party alliance (1960–1965) between his party and NCNC. Though Balewa’s indifferent attitude towards serious policy matters has been the subject of criticism, he is said to have been chiefly concerned with government stability as a basis for sustaining national unity (Adebayo 1986/2004).

Yet, despite the fact that pre-electoral alliances were more nationally integrative and cohesive, the ambitions of their elite founders were less about winning elections than about securing access to the state power that was so vital for ensuring continuous and centralized control over the distribution of public resources through the political executive. All pre-electoral alliances after 1965 either disintegrated or contributed to the disintegration of the political regime. The 1965 pre-electoral alliances were so strangely enacted between ideologically and organizationally opposing parties that they provoked social and political turmoil which broke down the regime in 1966. The 1978–79 pre-electoral alliance that eventually won the election broke down before the first mandate ended. The 1982–83 pre-electoral alliance that won the general elections survived no more than three months after the government’s inauguration,

by which time both the presiding government and the alliance had collapsed. A closer look at these alliances shows a precarious overlap of vested interests and the usual government functions.

Thirdly, the military learnt from analogous past experiences to use political parties and convert its resources into informal network potentials for securing office longevity and controlling the helms of government. Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) was the first military ruler to use and abuse political party instruments in a failed attempt to inaugurate an inter-regime (military to civilian) extension of office-holding. Babangida's nationally enacted Political Bureau (Diamond et al. 1999) was a forerunner of the network aimed to support a centrally controlled two-party system. Faced with severe social resistance, Babangida's government failed, but the military regime continued. The network that Babangida left behind facilitated Abacha's (1993–1998) self-appointment and establishment as another brand of military dictatorship. This one sought to explore the resources of political parties to promote continuity in political executive power and roles.

Ken Saro Wiwa was an Ogoni activist who defied the nefarious and extensive military-led network alliances of the powerful Nigerian political class. He was sentenced to the maximum penalty of death for daring to challenge the operatives of the network linked to Abacha's government. The conclusion is that, independent of regime type, the proliferation of political institutions has been a handy tool for incumbent political executives. Political institutions have burgeoned without provoking changes in the composition of the political executive elite and their capacity to deliver public services.

The political executive elite have converted formal institutional frameworks into instruments for activating and sponsoring informal networks through patron-client arrangements. Apart from contributing to legitimate government conduct, patronage-based networks energize the continuities in political executive power by similar self-serving individuals and groups. That is, the manipulation of political parties for private purposes based on network nodes, patronage exchanges and other practices has historically characterized the occupancy of political executive offices.

### 7.2.3 Dysfunctional Elite Composition Inhibits True Regime Change

An important conclusion on the relationship between the character of the core political executive elite and the political system is that despite myriad institutional changes and crises no significant regime change has in fact occurred since colonial rule. This finding invalidates, in the Nigerian case, the arguments of regime change theorists who associate severe social crisis with renewals in elite composition and political regime change. The argument of Burton and Higley (1998) that internal crises are linked to renewals in elite composition and regime change has no clear application in post-colonial Nigeria. There have been abrupt, brutal and momentous crises in the Nigerian polity. Yet the political system, as demonstrated in this study with the use of literature sources and Freedom House data on political rights and civil liberties, shows no significant change. Based on the character of the core political executive elite, no noticeable changes have occurred from a closed regime (such as colonial and military rule) to an open regime (especially democratic).

Apart from the colonial rule legacy and rapid rise of government revenue, Nigeria has been beset by abrupt and brutal experiences such as the civil war, horrendous military dictatorships and a post-election annulment debacle that provoked mass turmoil. None of these crises or their combined effects led to the regime change that might have been expected or to the removal of the country's powerful political executive elites. On the contrary, the political executive elite, closely supported by the political class, has continued to develop devices for adjusting to structural changes without necessarily boosting the operation of the political system. The persistence of selective government support, to the detriment of social voice in politics, has thus assumed an iniquitous and contradictory pattern in Nigeria.

Elite selectivity and continuity in political executive offices contradict the seminal wisdom of engaging 'the loyalty of new groups to the system' by 'comparatively' permitting their access or 'incorporating' their interests in legitimate political institutions (Lipset 1959: 88). The absence of new groups and the marginalization of important segments of Nigerian society (minorities, women, students, farmers, labour unions and labour leaders) inhibit the 'responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals' (Dahl 1971). Ironically, rights to freedom and equality variously appear in the so-called 'democ-



ritic' constitutions of Nigeria promulgated in 1960 and 1979 and in the current 1999 document.

The patterns observed in the circulation, composition and character of the political executive demonstrates the frailty of elite attitudes and behaviour towards formal office-holding in the national executive sphere. If, as according to Ake (1975), political attitudes and behaviour derive from constant interactions between actors in ways that affect the political structure, the interactive weaknesses observed in the Nigerian case have likely had negative implications for the political system. That is, the dominance of certain attitudes (rent-seeking, patronage, corruption, coercion, manipulation of ethnic symbols and 'godfather' politics) among the political executive elite is at variance with the essence of good political governance – openness, inclusiveness, responsiveness and responsibility.

#### 7.2.4 Special Interests Underlie Power and Role Continuities

The findings of this study reveal that common social background, informally selective networks and shared attitudes are important factors in explaining the composition and continuity of political executive offices. The typical attitudes (rent-seeking, patronage, corruption, coercion, ethnic and godfather politics) that were found to characterize the composition of the political executive elite imply bad public choices. That is, the socially unrepresentative elite preferences that manifest at the executive office level substantially restrict political liberties and civil rights. These preferences were analysed here in terms of the vested interests that tend to dominate the attitudes and behaviour of those charged with the public responsibility to initiate, supervise and deliver policies in post-colonial Nigeria.

Preferences of the core political executive elite have historically responded more to the necessities, anxieties and avarice of the Nigerian political class than to the legitimate demands of the Nigerian masses. The undermining of public preferences stems from the insecurity and 'phobia' overtly and continually felt by the post-colonial Nigerian elite. In response, the elite has resorted to socially wilful attitudes and practices such as rent-seeking, patronage exchanges, corruption, manipulation and co-optation of select members of society to maintain political executive power. The pertinent conclusion is that, contrary to the liberal-

pluralist expectation that the 'contents' of particular group or categorical 'interests' change over time relative to the 'contending' groups' positions (Hindes 1986: 114), both the positions and interests embodied by the Nigerian political executive elite and its political class supporters have been historically unresponsive to change.

### 7.3 Theoretical Implications of Findings

This research sought to contribute to understanding about the lack of circulation within the uppermost influential positions of the Nigerian polity – the core political executives. Consequently, it became pertinent to expose the invalidity of two generally propounded theoretical positions about the motivations of elite circulation and transformations in the political executive power structure with varied outcomes for the political regime. Firstly, Marxist assumptions about the causal link between economic power and political power did not prove helpful for understanding the realities of the Nigerian polity. Marxist assumptions lead to scepticism about the possibility of social circulation in political executive offices other than that directly emanating from the productive class. Marxists do not believe in gradual processes of reform such as structural changes and elite transformation but, rather, in abrupt and profound alterations in the social system mainly through revolution leading to a classless society.

The political executive elite of post-colonial Nigeria share common characteristics. They derive their support from harnessing different types of elite (socio-cultural, economic, military, traditional and political) to cross-cutting networks. The core political elite have built their support base on a patronage-driven network sustained by state revenues. In post-colonial Nigeria, both cash crops and unprecedented revenues from the sale of oil in international markets have served as sources of rents for the survival of the political class. However, political power has been a constant pursuit of the political class and a primary source of group cohesion aimed at assuaging the perceived insecurity and 'phobia' over social group deprivation and self-destruction. Instead of a Marxist-based dominant economic class, a political class usurper and controller of state resources for actualizing self-interests is more applicable in the Nigerian case. Paradoxical is that state resources have been used to co-opt like-minded group elite leaders and to organize political power and roles

based on institutional proliferation without meaningful or radical (in a Marxian sense) social change. In other words, institutional dynamics have failed to provoke positive social change capable of correcting the dominant system.

The second theoretical proposition hinges on the liberal-pluralist view that political power will be dispersed over autonomous groups with a neutral state as arbiter of last resort. The liberal pluralists argue that structural change will transform the power structure by rendering it more amenable to social penetration and socially desired outcomes. The findings of this study at first seem to confirm the liberal-pluralist view of heterogeneity of elite social background, which would permit public debate and compromise (Dahl 1971, Keller 1963/1991). However, and more importantly, the major challenge to liberal pluralism in Nigeria is the parasitical oligarchic power structure that feeds on state resources instead of responding to social demand and being sustained on social support.

Political power in Nigeria circulates among a small number of individuals and groups that survive by their utilization of state resources. This dependency defines an oligarchic tangle that has beset the Nigerian polity since political independence. The oligarchic tangle of the Nigerian polity persists despite an array of structural changes and varied elite social backgrounds. This interpretation is at variance with liberal-pluralist assumptions about elite transformation based on structural changes and a plurality of elite backgrounds. While the recurrence of a particular elite background and interests in political executive offices seriously limits the validity of liberal-pluralist and Marxist assumptions, it corroborates the advanced critical elite theories that provided the main foundation for this study. In particular, the recurrence of a common elite background and the realization of special interests using state resources – and at variance with the preferences of the wider Nigerian society – undercuts the premise of state neutrality advanced by the liberal pluralists. It can be safely suggested that the absence of a workable neutral state and the presence of a heavy-handed state is in Nigeria linked to state capture instead of state perpetuation.

The critical elite theories depart from Hunter's (1951) power structure and Mills' (1956/2000) power elite model, which presuppose a tightly connected elite circle. Elite connection is said to build up in the power structure through common backgrounds and social networks that oper-

ate under enlarged institutions responsible for making important decisions that affect ordinary people's lives (Hunter 1951, Mills 1956/2000, Domhoff 1986, Mann 1992, Scott 2008, Moore et al. 2002, Acemoglu and Robinson 2008). Mills (1956/2000) suggested that a triumvirate made up of the economic, military and political segments, circulates continually and composes the power structure. Further expansions of the critical elite theories depict a broad inclusion of major elite groups as consistent with pluralist models of power. However, social inclusion recurs through networks that Higley et al. (1991) portray as 'shifting, informal and mainly invisible central power circles which afford the leaders of different organizations, institutional sectors and camps of opinions relatively easy, safe access to one another' (Higley et al. 1991: 50). In Nigeria, a relatively easy-cum-safe mutual access to the power structure implies the foreclosure of participation in political processes and outcomes to the majority of Nigerians.

As observed in the analysis, social networks in Nigeria permit the facile interaction amongst various elite groups in constant collusions linked to organizational and institutional resources used for supporting access to and retention of political executive offices. An implication of the elusive networks that integrate the activities of the political class and political executive elite is that real power tends to repose less in the formal state realm than, as respectively suggested by Serrat (2009) and Wendel (2009), in decentralized power centres and in unaccountable elite groups.

This study thus gives rise to three major theoretical conclusions. First, no particular elite type firmly dominates the Nigerian power structure, especially at the influential political executive level. The military elite have ruled the Nigerian polity for about two-thirds of the post-colonial period. However, the military often rely on civilian elites, ranging from traditional elites to techno-bureaucratic elites, business elites and political elites. Incorporation of these groups has served to boost the military's legitimacy in the 'strange nest' of political power. Similarly, civilian regimes and rulers have variously incorporated or co-opted different elite categories, including military personnel, in their respective governments. Ethno-regional elites, especially those, such as the Hausa-Fulani, from the populous and cohesive Northern region may have had hegemonic intentions that never moved beyond trials which were often challenged by others. The point is that the Nigerian political class and political executive elite derive from and form a relatively cohesive group of various

elite and sub-elite types acting from an informal background while using formal state power to further their interests. In other words, they all share this common background and special interests.

Second, liberal-pluralist theory has limited validity in the case of Nigeria. As revealed by the data on the composition of the supposedly key state representatives at the political executive level, the state since colonial rule has been embedded in a cohesive social network through which the political class usurpers capture state resources for their own benefit.

Third, elite ascension to political executive power and their retention of these roles depend less on economic factors as espoused by Marxists than on non-economic factors as postulated by pluralists. However, both of these theories' understandings about a cohesive and embedded political power structure qualify the core political executive elite of Nigeria as a ruling class rather than as heterogeneously strategic elite. Because the power of the Nigerian elite has relied on state resources, the elite form a powerful political class with an oligarchic or ruling class pattern, as shown by Keller in *Beyond the Ruling Class* (1963/1991). The composition of the Nigerian political executive elite is more the outcome of a selectively quantitative and likeminded pattern of group circulation rather than a result of qualitative social representation. Thus it has yet to move beyond the ruling class predicament.

The higher education and distinctive schooling background found especially within the ranks of the Nigerian elite have become the basis of an informal (flex) network, which acts as a self-serving tool rather than a social formula for opening up the power structure. If formal education has contributed to social dysfunction in post-colonial Nigeria, there is a need to look more deeply into the oligarchic pattern of power-holding in the country to discern its relationship with the control of information for development purposes. Similarly, this study offers a caveat to the recent calls for revitalizing civil society through such agencies of empowerment as formal education and non-governmental organizations. Any action in this direction must assume a holistic outlook. In a resource-rich but poverty stricken country like Nigeria, it can no longer be overlooked that the elite are still very powerful and adept in regenerating their old ways of doing political business outside of good governance criteria.

#### 7.4 Policy Implications of Findings

One finding of this research relates to the lack of socially meaningful elite circulation into and out of political executive offices, coupled with typical elite practices that have come to symbolize the very power structure itself. This deficiency has implied reproduction of political power instead of its renewal, especially at the topmost executive level at which key socially relevant decisions are made. Lack of elite circulation in political executive offices is associated with recurrent office-holding and allocation of state roles based on similarity of social backgrounds and interests. Moreover, insufficient elite circulation in high political executive offices in post-colonial Nigeria has occurred in tandem with the marginalization of important social groups. One of the most notable groups excluded from political executive processes are Nigeria's minorities.

Exclusion of minorities from the national executive power structure has led to the acute and ongoing crisis in the Niger Delta minority zone and to intermittent ethnic clashes elsewhere. A large portion of government revenue is in fact derived from government controlled production and sale of petroleum from the Niger Delta. On the basis of critical elite analysis, the transformation of the power structure is a *sine qua non* for averting socially undesired disorder like that which is commonplace in this region. Critical elitists note that transformation of a power structure is brought about primarily by periodic changes in leadership power and roles, considered '[as] key to an entirely new theory of the "ruling class"' (Prewitt and Stone 1993: 134–135).

Necessary transformations in the power structure go beyond just 'change of guard' recommendations tabled through politicized cabinet reshuffles or informal crisis-vulnerable power rotation formula, which in Nigeria have employed patronage-based co-optation to ensure the selective inclusion of likeminded elite individuals and groups. Change in the power structure requires renewal not just by the physical replacement of individuals or groups, but, most importantly, by regeneration of beliefs and ideas about values and interests. Such ideas should be amenable to coherent policy actions guided by equity principles in the distribution of outcomes.

Elite leadership critiques emphasize the need for political institutions to produce and reproduce the beliefs that consistently structure attitudes

and behaviour in the polity (Galbraith 1974, Dudley 1982, Verba 2003, Wetzel and Abrahamson 2008). Lamentably, the Nigerian case demonstrates a contrary view. Practices such as rent-seeking, selective patronage exchanges, corruption, excessive use of force, and ethnic and 'godfather' politics have eroded institutional values and socially founded preferences. Therefore, Galbraith's (1974) incisive wisdom that 'the emancipation of belief is the most fundamental of the tasks of reform and the one on which all else depends' (p. 223) is very relevant for Nigeria. Expected institutional and organizational changes cannot effectively take root in the Nigerian polity without true emancipation from the so-called 'colonial legacy', ethnic bigotry and rapacious elite attitudes towards the management of public resources and their replacement with socially productive reforms.

More specifically, it is a systemic oversight to emphasize transformation in the composition and character of the political executive elite without reflecting on the extended implications for the political system. Substantive guarantees of political rights and civil liberties are still absent or deficient in Nigeria, despite the various alternations in the nation's political system, including the current rejoinder of the democratic experiment since 1999. Freedom House data on the Nigerian polity and information from other related sources reveal shortfalls in democratic governance. Governance management is less a role fulfilled by the people, than a formal occupation and effective exercise of political offices by elite leaders representing specific segments of society. Recent surveys show that though Nigerians have historically and continually supported democracy, they are 'most critical of the government of the day', hence 'democracy remains fragile and suffers a growing deficit of popular confidence' (Afrobarometer 2006, 2009: online).

The analyses and findings of this study point to the persistent problem of the incomplete and inconclusive regime changes that since colonial rule have played a large role in deficiencies in the circulation, composition and character of the key drivers of change – the core political executive elite. Incomplete regime change can undercut government capacity to assist the poor and underprivileged (Davenport 2000). Effective policy measures that secure rights to freedom and equality are therefore urgently needed in Nigeria. The institution of the presidency has historically implied bloated executive powers (Graf 1988) with guaranteed access to patronage resources used to amass political power at the expense

of the masses. The occupancy of political offices should be rendered more accountable to the people instead of to the vested, special interests of the political class.

Political inclusiveness, as Verba (2003) clarified, should be understood and applied not merely in terms of quantity but, more importantly, in terms of the quality of interest representation by office-holders. Specifically, the operation and efficacy of the current 'Federal Character' principle for recruiting political executive officers since 1979 requires objective appraisal and adaptation. More important than making swift or 'quick-fix' (reactive and unstable)<sup>1</sup> informal elite accords for partaking in the highly valued political executive offices, elites should focus on the social development and stability of Nigeria. However, the path to development requires a holistic outlook. As one critical elite analyst recognized, 'a significant measure of consensus and normative harmony may be necessary among the ruling group [as the Nigerian case suggests], but it is the absence of consensus among the lower classes which keeps them compliant' (Mann 1982: 391). Therefore, appropriate and objective programmes of mass education and empowerment plus conscious and coherent measures of social inclusiveness in key political decision-making processes are necessary in Nigeria to embolden the political consciousness of the people towards changes that can lead to social development.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Reaction marked by a quick and unreliable response to certain demands. In politics, for example, such response to social demands lacks stability, i.e. while implying a palliative social effect; it turns out mostly in favor of its initiators. It is therefore elitist.





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## Appendices

### Location of Sources

Federal Ministry of Information, National Archives, Nigeria (Abuja, Ibadan, Kaduna and Lagos)

National University Libraries:

- Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.
- University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

National Libraries:

- Lagos, Nigeria
- Kaduna, Nigeria
- Abuja, Nigeria

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Henry Ani Kifordu attended postgraduate courses and obtained a Master Degree Certificate in Political Science and Specialization Certificate in Economics, respectively, from University of Brasilia, Brazil (1996) and Federal University of Paraiba, Brazil (1992). His Master's degree thesis focused on the economic, social and political impacts of privatization of the Brazilian state-owned iron and steel industry. His BA in Administration was obtained in 1989 from the Federal University of Paraiba, Brazil.

Since 1996 Henry Kifordu has worked as university lecturer and social researcher, especially in the blended field of politics and economics. His academic research was concerned with government agents' characteristics and activities that affect social and economic development. As lecturer and researcher he participated in various seminars and conferences about political and economic development. He also worked as political adviser to candidates seeking election to the Brazilian Federal House of Assembly.

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