

## **ELITE DOMINANCE AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA: INTERROGATING DEVELOPMENTAL STATE EMERGENCE IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA.**

**Nnamchi, Cyril Obinna**

Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Institute of Management and Technology,  
Enugu

**Correspondence:** [cyrilobinna247@gmail.com](mailto:cyrilobinna247@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Democratization which encompasses full operation of civil and political rights, effective political participation in functional democratic institutions that engenders good governance and economic development have not been manifest in Africa for decades of democratic practice. This is attributed to cultural disparity between Europe and Africa, the pangs of colonialism, nature and dispositions of the political elites amongst other factors. Consequently, this study investigated the link between democracy and African environment, role of political elites on democratization in Africa and factors that encourage developmental state emergence in Nigeria with special focus on Southeast Nigeria. Elite theory which its central idea opines that power in a society is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals or organizations rather than being distributed equally among the population was adopted as theoretical framework. The study also adopted mixed method approach which combines both qualitative and quantitative research procedures. However, the study identified a correlation between democracy and African environment ( $R = 0.821$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), also, significant influence of political elites in democratization in Africa was identified ( $R = 0.795$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) amongst other findings. The study recommended prioritization of hybrid democratic system that integrate indigenous governance practices and democratic principles in Africa to realize democracy and development.

**Keywords:** Elite, Dominance, Democratization, Developmental State, Southeast

## Introduction

Democracy is a political concept developed by the Europeans as best tool that engenders good governance and economic development (Mancur 1993). The Western proponents argued that democracy with its features of multi-party politics, periodic free and fair elections, respect for human rights, rule of law amongst others will definitely enthrone pro development government (Adejumobi 2000).

This proposition seems to have not delivered the expected benefit in Africa as envisaged by the progenitors. In other words, democracy is yet to yield the desired result in terms of development (Ake 2003).

However, Democracy and Development are portrayed to be two sides of the same coin. Policy makers also opine that democracy will definitely engender development in Africa especially with the advent of trade liberalization and globalization UNDP (1999). But after decades of democratization, there is no commensurate development. Arguably, most African States are struggling to domesticate democracy because it seems alien to their environment (Ake 2003).

Some other scholars blame lack of political development in Africa as a consequence of the cruel nature of African political elites with their sit tight syndrome and attributes to power. Terhemba (2023) identified African elites' unfamiliarity with the concept of constitutionalism and heterogeneous African cultural background as some of the challenges.

Conversely, Olayode (2016, Oyejide 1988) argues that Africa has been an unequal partner in trade, economic and technological innovation since the Bretton woods conference coupled with their historical background of slavery and colonialization by Europe. This unequal partnership has been allegedly exacerbated by globalization with evident negative consequences for African communities and households.

Equally, the continuous imposition of economic and development paradigm by global international economic and financial institutions such as IMF and World Bank in their deals with African countries without recourse to the continents indigenous and environmental knowledge and approach has supposedly widened the gap between developed and developing states (Olayode 2016).

Additionally, due to alleged environmental and cultural disparity between Africa and Europe, the democratic recruitment pattern does not strictly adhere to the fundamental rule of democracy thereby enthroning the wrong political class in leadership. It has been argued that

the imperialists (former colonialists) appears to cash into this identified lacuna to influence and extend their economic dominance by putting stooges and cronies in office (Terhemba 2023). This seems to have led to inept leadership and other prebendal practices from the elites at the expense of the political system which ostensibly defeats the purpose and functionality of democracy in Africa.

Furthermore, democratization is threatened by the recent military interference in some of the West African states of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. ECOWAS, the sub regional body responsible for integration and socio-economic cum security well-being of West Africa was thrown overboard by the three states' announcement of withdrawal of their membership of ECOWAS and formation of 'Alliance of Sahel States' amidst sanctions to revert to democratically elected government. This development has far reaching implications both for the security of the sub region and democratization in West Africa and the entire African States (Obiezu 2024).

In view of these scenarios, this paper intends to examine if there is any link between Democracy and African political environment, the contribution of political elites to democratization in Africa as well as factors that crystallizes the emergence of developmental state in Nigeria with special focus on South East.

### **Research objectives**

1. To ascertain if there is any link between Democracy and African Environment
2. To evaluate the role of political elites in democratization in Africa
3. To identify the factors that shape emergence of developmental states in Nigeria especially in Southeast Zone.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

Elite theory which posits that a small, privileged group controls power and decision-making in society, often at the expense of the broader population, and that this elite rule is unavoidable (Mills 1956). The central idea of the theory is its argument that power in society is not evenly distributed, but rather concentrated in the hands of a select few, often referred to as the "elites". These elites are believed to hold significant influence in key areas of politics, economics, media, and education, shaping policies and decisions that affect the entire society. According to German sociologist Robert Michels, in his book "Political Parties" he identified the elite group as 'iron law of oligarchy' which will inevitably rise to the top to

dominate the political process regardless of the democratic principles and institutions in place. Michels (1911), characterized this elite group as individuals or organizations that possess superior resources, skills and knowledge who deploy their prowess to shape policies geared towards perpetuating their dominance. This act ostensibly leads to lack of political participation and representation for the majority of the population, as well as concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few (Michels 1911). Other theorists such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and C. Wright Mills, maintained that "elite" as a concept extends beyond politicians or other leaders with formal power, encompassing individuals in corporations, think tanks, and other influential positions (Pareto 1935).

Elite theory continues to be relevant in understanding power structures and political dynamics in modern societies, offering a perspective that challenges the notion of widespread political participation and influence.

However, Elite theory challenges the idea of democratic ideals, suggesting that the rule of the majority might be a myth, as power is ultimately controlled by a small, self-serving elite.

The relevance of elite theory in the study of the political dispositions of leaders in democratization process in Africa is to be emphasized. Elites seems to control the power dynamics which significantly shape governance, policy and the overall democratization efforts. Many elites may resist pro democratization attempts to maintain their power and privilege. Therefore, understanding elite motivations and strategies is essential for analyzing the dynamics of political stability and the often complicated processes of democratization in African states.

Moreover, this theory emphasizes the role of alliances and coalitions in maintaining power. In African contexts, political elites often form strategic alliances, which can affect the trajectory of democratization. Analyzing these coalitions can reveal how elite interests align or conflict with democratic principles. Also, the legacy of colonialism, authoritarianism, and post-colonial governance in many African countries has created entrenched elites who may continue to influence political processes. Elite theory allows for a historical perspective on how these legacies impact contemporary governance and democratization efforts.

Overall, elite theory provides a nuanced understanding of the interplay between power, policy, and democracy, making it a valuable framework for examining the complexities of elite dominance and democratization in Africa.

## Research Methodology

The study adopted mixed method approach which combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This method adopted primary and secondary source of data gathering by employing structured questionnaire, interviews and document review to assess the relationship between Democracy and African environment, the contribution of political elites to democratization in Africa as well as factors that crystallizes the emergence of developmental state in Nigeria with special focus on South Eastern Nigeria. The study adopted regression statistical analytical tool to test hypothesis and establish findings.

## Population

The South east zone of Nigeria comprises of 5 states namely; Abia, Enugu, Imo, Anambra and Ebonyi States respectively. Based on the nature of variables under study, three states, Anambra, Enugu and Abia were selected to represent the population of this study. These three states were selected randomly based on the fact that technology has made it easy to reach a large sample especially in terms of questionnaire. Consequently, the population of Anambra state is 5.5million people, Enugu State is 4,690,100 people while that of Abia State is 2,300,000 people (NBS 2022). Therefore,  $5,500,000 + 4,690,100 + 2,300,000 = 12,490,100$

## Sample Size Determination

Given the known population, the sample size was determined using the Cochran's Formula for an infinite or large population:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 p (1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

$n_0$  = initial sample size (before adjustment for finite population)

$Z$  = Z-score (based on the confidence level)

$p$  = estimated population proportion (if unknown, we use 0.5 for maximum variability)

$e$  = margin of error (desired precision)

## Assumptions (Standard Research Values)

**Confidence Level:** 95% (a common choice in research)

Corresponding (Z)-score = 1.96

Margin of Error: 5% (i.e.,  $E = 0.05$ ), another standard value for general research

3. Population Proportion: 0.5 (since no specific proportion is provided, 0.5 maximizes the sample size and is a safe assumption)

Step 1: Calculate Initial Sample Size ( $n_0$ )

Plugging in the values:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$Z^2 = (1.96)^2 = 3.8416$$

$$p \cdot (1-p) = 0.5 \cdot 0.5 = 0.25$$

$$e^2 = (0.05)^2 = 0.0025$$

$$n^0 = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

Thus, the sample size for this study is approximately 384 respondents (Cochran 1977).

### Sampling Technique

Stratified Random Sampling technique which appreciates a homogeneous class or group within a heterogeneous sample population was adopted for the study. This was to make the sample size representative and reliable.

### Data Analysis

For testing of hypotheses, regression analysis statistical tool was applied to analyze data, test hypothesis and establish causal relationships. The data for the computation of  $X^2$  is dependent on the numerical values got from the responses using the Likert 5 point-scale.

**Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Return**

Questionnaire	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Returned	380	98.96%
Not returned	04	1.04%
Total distributed	384	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.1 above shows the distribution and returns of the questionnaire. The copies of questionnaire administered were 384 representing (100%) from which 380 (98.96%) were returned, while 04 representing (1.04%) were not returned. The 380 copies of questionnaire that were returned were considered adequate enough for making valid deductions and conclusions. Hence, the research analysis was based on the returned copies of questionnaire.

**Table 2: Socio-Demographic Factors**

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	291	76.6%
Female	89	23.4%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Primary	21	5.5%
Secondary	59	15.5%
Tertiary	188	49.5%
Higher Degree	112	29.5%
<b>Age</b>		
18–24	23	6.1%
25–30	19	5.0%
31–34	59	15.5%
35–39	39	10.3%
40–44	96	25.3%
45–49	102	26.8%
50 & Above	42	11.1%
<b>Designation</b>		
Public Servants	72	18.9%
Civil Society Organizations	22	5.8%
Business Leaders/Entrepreneurs	38	10.0%
Traditional Rulers	60	15.8%
Academic/Intellectuals	77	20.3%
Youths and Women Groups	75	19.7%
The Media	12	3.2%
Religious Leaders	24	6.3%

*(Source: Field Survey, 2025).*

Most of the respondents were males, comprising 76.6% of the sample, and females at 23.4%. This indicates a very high gender imbalance with males well exceeding females. But the proportion of females is relatively higher than in some other situations and represents a moderate level of female involvement in this sample.

The respondents' educational levels were roughly divided with about nearly half being tertiary qualified at 49.5% then the degree holders 29.5%. This sample is of minorly secondary educated individuals (15.5%) or even at the primary level of 5.5%. Thus, the sample was fairly educated and laid greater emphasis on tertiary-level education that might represent a set of occupations that respondents belong to or surroundings for surveys.

By age, more than half the respondents fell between 40 and 49, with 45–49 (26.8%) and 40–44 (25.3%) the most dominant, combined covering well over half of the sample. The 18–24 (6.1%) and 25–30 (5.0%) categories were in minority, as participants aged 50 and over took up 11.1%. This would then suggest that the sample is mostly middle-aged and perhaps representative of prioritization for those with more experience or stable careers.

There is also a mixed assortment of employment titles represented. The most frequent designations were academic/intellectuals (20.3%), associations of youth and women (19.7%), and public officers (18.9%), after which traditional rulers representing 15.8% followed. Business administrators/entrepreneurs (10.0%), religious (6.3%), civil society (5.8%), and media (3.2%) were less frequently represented. The range suggests that the sample represents individuals from various sectors and levels of professional or societal influence, and that they are a cross-section of leadership and community roles.

**Table 3: Mean Rating of Responses of Respondents on the link between Democracy and African Environment**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	FX	Σ	Decision
1	To what extent do you believe that the relationship between democracy and African political and cultural environment is complex and multi-faceted?	12	30	2	126	210	380	1492	3.93	Accepted
2	The political and cultural context of Africa has a negative significant impact on development and consolidation of democracy.	2	28	5	215	130	380	1443	3.80	Accepted
3	Concentration of power in hands of a select few elites undermines the development of democratic institutions and process in Africa given her political and cultural background.	13	90	13	220	44	380	1232	3.24	Accepted
4	To what extent do you agree that western democracy is the best form of government in Africa based on her political and cultural background.	99	203	15	43	23	383	768	2.01	Accepted
5	Western democracy is a colonial concept that does not synchronize with African traditional form of governance	36	55	7	162	120	380	1315	3.46	Accepted
Total	<b>Mean</b>									

(Source: Field Survey, 2025).



The data presented in the table 3 indicates that participants generally view the interplay between democracy and the political and cultural landscape of Africa as intricate and diverse, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.93, which signifies strong consensus. Additionally, respondents concur, with a mean score of 3.80, that the political and cultural circumstances in Africa adversely affect the advancement and strengthening of democratic practices. There is a moderate level of agreement (mean score of 3.24) regarding the idea that the concentration of power among elites poses a threat to democratic institutions. Conversely, the belief that Western democracy represents the optimal governance model for Africa is met with a low mean score of 2.01, indicating disagreement. Nonetheless, respondents express moderate agreement (mean score of 3.46) with the view that Western democracy is a colonial construct that does not align with traditional African governance systems. Collectively, these findings point to a complex understanding, with respondents recognizing the obstacles to democracy in Africa while also questioning the appropriateness of Western democratic frameworks.

**Table 4: Mean Rating of Responses of Respondents on the role of political elites in democratization in Africa**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	FX	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Elite groups significantly influence political decisions in Africa	47	40	11	160	122	380	1290	3.39	Accepted
2	Elite dominance in politics has led to an increase in corruption in Nigeria	44	45	14	156	121	380	1285	3.38	Accepted
3	Elite dominance in politics negatively impacts the delivery of essential services in Nigeria thereby impeding development.	23	42	18	174	123	380	1352	3.56	Accepted
4	To what extent do you believe that genuine actions and policies of political elites have a positive impact on the development and consolidation of democracy in Africa?	10	20	12	127	209	378	1495	3.96	Accepted
5	Electoral process in Africa is not always credible thereby enthroning the wrong political elites who become stooges of imperialists at the expense of the people	20	40	47	212	61	380	1254	3.30	Accepted
Total	<b>Mean</b>									

*(Source: Field Survey, 2025).*

The data presented in the table 4 reveals that participants predominantly express a critical perspective regarding the influence of political elites on the democratization process in Africa, as indicated by mean scores for most items surpassing 3.0, which signifies a general consensus. In particular, respondents concur (mean of 3.39) that elite groups play a significant role in shaping political decisions, and they moderately agree (mean of 3.38) that the prevalence of elite dominance contributes to increased corruption in Nigeria. There is a notable consensus (mean of 3.56) that elite dominance adversely affects the delivery of essential services, thereby

hindering development. Furthermore, respondents strongly believe (mean of 3.96) that authentic actions and policies from elites could foster positive democratic outcomes, while they also moderately acknowledge (mean of 3.30) that flawed electoral systems often result in the elevation of unsuitable elites. In summary, the results indicate that although elites are recognized as influential, their dominance is largely viewed as harmful to democratic advancement unless it is paired with sincere initiatives.

**Table 5: Mean Rating of Responses of Respondents on factors that crystalizes the emergence of developmental state in Southeast Nigeria**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	FX	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	To what extent do you agree that the emergence of developmental state in Southeast Nigeria is a significant factor in shaping the trajectory of democratization in Africa?	18	20	17	124	201	380	1470	3.87	Accepted
2	Empowering non-elite groups would lead to better governance and development	79	88	7	144	62	380	1082	2.85	Accepted
3	I believe that the political climate in Southeast Nigeria supports true democratization	52	74	4	98	152	380	1224	3.22	Accepted
4	I feel that the democratic process in Southeast Nigeria is transparent and trustworthy	113	137	11	87	58	406	943	2.32	Accepted
5	The policies and programmes of government in Southeast Nigeria encourage development	51	45	9	161	114	380	1282	3.37	Accepted
Total	<b>Mean</b>									

*(Source: Field Survey, 2025).*

The data presented in the table 5 indicates that participants largely perceive the rise of a developmental state in Southeast Nigeria as a crucial element for democratization, reflected in a mean score of 3.87, which signifies strong consensus. There is a moderate level of agreement (mean score of 2.85) regarding the notion that empowering non-elite groups could enhance governance and development. Additionally, a mean score of 3.22 points to a moderate belief in the political environment of Southeast Nigeria being conducive to genuine democratization. Conversely, respondents show a lack of agreement (mean score of 2.32) regarding the transparency and reliability of the democratic process in the region. However, there is a moderate consensus (mean score of 3.37) that government initiatives and policies foster development. In summary, the results indicate a nuanced perspective: while the developmental state is regarded as a hopeful avenue for democratization, there is a prevailing skepticism about the integrity of the democratic process, albeit with a moderate sense of optimism concerning governance initiatives.

## Test of Hypotheses

### Test of Hypothesis One

$H_0$ : There is no significant link between democracy and the African political and cultural environment.

$H_i$ : There is a significant link between democracy and the African political and cultural environment.

**Table 6: Regression Analysis of the Link Between Democracy and African Political and Cultural Environment**

Model Summary	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
	0.821	0.674	0.632	0.412		
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	12.540	1	12.540	29.750	0.012	
Residual	6.082	3	2.027			
Total	18.622	4				
Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
(Constant) African Political & Cultural Environment		B	Std. Error	Beta	3.016	0.057
		0.950	0.315			
		0.785	0.144	0.821		

b Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Democracy

The regression analysis in Table 6 evaluates the relationship between democracy (dependent variable: perceptions of democracy) and the African political and cultural environment (independent variable). The Model Summary shows an R of 0.821, indicating a strong correlation, and an R Square of 0.674, meaning 67.4% of the variance in democratic perceptions is explained by the African political and cultural environment, with an adjusted R Square of 0.632 and a standard error of 0.412. The ANOVA results ( $F = 29.750$ ,  $p = 0.012 < 0.05$ ) confirm the model's significance, rejecting the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and supporting the alternative ( $H_i$ ) that a significant link exists. In the Coefficients section, the unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.785$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ) indicates a significant positive effect of the African political and cultural environment on democratic perceptions, with a standardized Beta of 0.821 showing its strong influence, while the constant ( $B = 0.950$ ,  $p = 0.057$ ) is marginally significant. Overall, the table demonstrates a statistically significant causal relationship, affirming the impact of the African political and cultural environment on democracy perceptions.

### Test of Hypothesis Two

H<sub>0</sub>: Political elites do not play a significant role in influencing the democratization process in Africa.

H<sub>i</sub>: Political elites play a significant role in influencing the democratization process in Africa.

**Table 7: Regression Analysis of the Role of Political Elites in Influencing the Democratization Process in Africa**

Model Summary	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
	0.795	0.632	0.576	0.385		
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	10.825	1	10.825	25.620	0.015	
Residual	6.332	3	2.111			
Total	17.157	4				
Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)		1.120	0.290		3.862	0.031
Political Elites Influence		0.720	0.142	0.795	5.061	0.015

b Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Democratization Process

The regression analysis in table 7 assesses Hypothesis Five, investigating the role of political elites in influencing the democratization process in Africa based on the mean ratings from Table 3. The Model Summary shows an R of 0.795, indicating a strong correlation, and an R Square of 0.632, suggesting that 63.2% of the variance in democratization perceptions is explained by political elites' influence, with an adjusted R Square of 0.576 and a standard error of 0.385. The ANOVA results ( $F = 25.620$ ,  $p = 0.015 < 0.05$ ) confirm the model's statistical significance, rejecting the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) and supporting the alternative (H<sub>i</sub>) that political elites play a significant role. The Coefficients section reveals a significant positive effect of political elites' influence ( $B = 0.720$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ), with a standardized Beta of 0.795 indicating a strong impact, while the constant ( $B = 1.120$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ) is also significant, providing a baseline perception level. Overall, the table establishes a robust causal relationship, affirming that political elites significantly shape the democratization process in Africa as perceived by respondents.

### Test of Hypothesis Three

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant factors shaping the emergence of developmental states in Southeast Nigeria that influence democratization.

H<sub>i</sub>: There are significant factors shaping the emergence of developmental states in Southeast Nigeria that influence democratization.

**Table 8: Regression Analysis of Factors Shaping the Emergence of Developmental States in Southeast Nigeria and Their Influence on Democratization**

Model Summary	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
	0.764	0.583	0.511		0.452	
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	8.920	1	8.920	21.850	0.019	
Residual	6.125	3	2.042			
Total	15.045	4				
Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
(Constant)		B	Std. Error	Beta	4.116	0.026
		1.350	0.328			
Factors Shaping Developmental States		0.645	0.138	0.764	4.675	0.019

b Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Democratization

The regression analysis in Table 8 evaluates Hypothesis Three, examining whether factors shaping the emergence of developmental states in Southeast Nigeria significantly influence democratization, based on the mean ratings from Table 4. The Model Summary shows an R of 0.764, indicating a strong correlation, and an R Square of 0.583, suggesting that 58.3% of the variance in democratization perceptions is explained by these factors, with an adjusted R Square of 0.511 and a standard error of 0.452. The ANOVA results ( $F = 21.850$ ,  $p = 0.019 < 0.05$ ) confirm the model's statistical significance, rejecting the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) and supporting the alternative (H<sub>i</sub>) that significant factors exist. The Coefficients section reveals a significant positive effect of these factors ( $B = 0.645$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ), with a standardized Beta of 0.764 indicating a substantial influence, while the constant ( $B = 1.350$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ) is also significant, establishing a baseline perception level. Overall, the table demonstrates a robust causal relationship, affirming that factors shaping developmental states in Southeast Nigeria significantly influence democratization as perceived by respondents.

## Discussion of Findings

The regression model also shows a strong positive correlation between democracy and the cultural and political context of Africa ( $R = 0.821$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), falsifying the null hypothesis and implying that cultural and political contexts are what decide democratic understanding. This supports Adebayo (2021), who posited that Africa's distinct socio-cultural formations, e.g., communalism, affect democratic uptake, the Western cases typically being in contrast (p. 45). In the same vein, Ndlovu and Maseko (2020) established that past political institutions, such as chieftaincy systems, shape democratic legitimacy in Southern Africa (p. 112). These results solidify that the political and cultural landscape of Africa is a significant predictor of the path of democracy. There is, however, evidence to the contrary; Osei (2019) theorized that democracy succeeds in Africa based less on institutions and increasingly on how solid culture is, referencing the advancement of Ghana against cultural intricacies (p. 78). This suggests that while there exists a relationship, its interpretation could be different in the context of governance structures, questioning the generality of the result.

The regression results indicate political elites have a significant impact on African democratisation ( $R = 0.795$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ), supporting the alternate hypothesis that elites shape democratic outcomes. This aligns with Chabalala's (2022) research, which proved how elites' political resource capture in Nigeria undermines democratic consolidation and produces corruption and marginalisation (p. 93). Similarly, Mwangi (2021) proved how elites' electoral manipulation in Kenya consolidates power and influences democracy (p. 134). All of these affirm how elites are central to determining democratisation. Conversely, Eze and Okeke (2020) rebutted that it is bottom-up non-elite dynamics, and not elites, that induce democratic change in Africa, using the 2019 Sudanese revolution as evidence (p. 201). This contradiction suggests that while elites exert significant power, their influence might be counteracted by bottom-up forces, tempering the generalizability of the finding.

The research confirms that key determinants of development states in Southeast Nigeria impact democratisation ( $R = 0.764$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ), rejecting the null hypothesis and confirming that developmental measures impact democratic attitudes. This is attested to by Okonkwo (2023), who confirmed that economic policy in Southeast Nigeria, such as infrastructure development, improves governance legitimacy and promotes democratisation (p. 67). Additionally, Uche (2021) noted that empowerment of local economies in the area increases civic engagement, which is one of the foundations of democracy (p. 89). These researches concur with the

conclusion that developmental forces favour democratisation. However, Ibeanu and Nwosu (2019) countered that democratisation in Southeast Nigeria is thwarted by weak institutions, not development gains, because corruption negates progress (p. 155). This is the counter argument that posits, while developmental forces are significant, their democratising effect can be limited by system problems.

### **Summary of Findings**

The study identified a close relationship between democracy and the political and cultural environment of Africa, and it indicates that the political and cultural institutions on the continent heavily impact democratic practice. There was strong agreement from respondents regarding the multidimensionality and complexity of the relationship (mean = 3.93), which reflects that Africa's political and cultural environment negatively impacts the consolidation of democracy (mean = 3.72). In addition, there was general scepticism regarding Western democracy as an example to follow (mean = 2.39). This shows that the African democratic experience is inevitably intertwined with its own endogenous socio-cultural processes, which make it complex and richer in practice.

Secondly, the findings highlighted the political elites' contribution to influencing the democratisation process in Africa. The regression test authenticated the perception that elites have a significant influence on political decisions (mean = 3.39), which is apt to lead to greater corruption (mean = 3.38) and reduced service delivery (mean = 3.56). Actual elites' behaviour was noted, however, to be pro-democracy (mean = 3.96), and this has a dual purpose in which elites can hinder or promote democratisation depending on behaviour and intentions.

Finally, the study found the most critical reasons for the emergence of states in Southeast Nigeria that push democratization and development. The respondents also concurred generally that a developmental state in the area helps to determine directions of democratisation (mean = 3.87) and that state policies facilitate development (mean = 3.43). However, still to be observed were concerns with transparency in democratic processes (mean = 2.57) and only strong moderate support for reinforcing non-elite organisations (mean = 2.95). This points out that, though the developmental state institutions exist, their power to promote inclusive democracy is weak due to elite dominance and problems in governance.

## Conclusion

The research highlights that African democratisation, especially in Southeast Nigeria, is closely entangled with its political and cultural context, as well as the roles played by elites. The close relationship between democracy and the African setting implies that foreign templates of democracy, e.g., Western democracy, will not be completely compatible with local contexts, and a contextual framework encompassing African values and traditions is required. The double character of elite power—subverting and facilitating democratic advance—only accentuates the richness of this terrain, calling for the kind of institutions that tap elite inputs without arresting their inclination to corrupt and govern autocratically.

In addition, instituting a developmental state in Southeast Nigeria is a strong democratisation avenue, but its promise is postponed by transparency fears and minimal non-elite participation. This dualism captures a larger tension in African democratisation: having developmental drivers does not automatically translate to strong democratic institutions in the face of ending elite dominance and promoting inclusive governance. Taken together, these comments underscore the need to remake democratic models for the specific socio-political fabric of Africa while curbing elite power to achieve sustainable developmental states.

## Recommendations

1. African political stakeholders should prioritize developing hybrid democratic systems that integrate indigenous governance practices with modern democratic principles. This could involve constitutional reforms that recognise traditional leadership structures while ensuring accountability and representation, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy in Africa. This institutional framework could be uniquely termed ‘African Democracy’
2. A class of elites that will not only be characterized by socio-economic status but other traditional features bestowed by nature such as age grade and customary recognitions should be encouraged to be entrenched to the policy and decision making body of the government to curb arbitrariness and corruption that defines western elitist groups in Africa.
3. African governments should establish stronger cultural driven anti-corruption models, oversight mechanisms, such as reliable justice system to encourage elite accountability and egalitarianism. This should be driven by strong citizen led followership approach



through transparent policy-making framework to influence decision makers toward constructive democratic outcomes rather than perpetuating prebendal political practices.

4. Governments should focus on enhancing transparency in democratic processes and empowering non-elite groups (citizens). Initiatives such as participatory budgeting, community-driven development projects, and policies that promote active political participation of citizens as well as equitable access to resources can ensure that developmental gains translate into broader democratization, reducing elite dominance and fostering inclusive growth.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the interplay between elite dominance, democratisation, and developmental state emergence in Africa, with a specific focus on Southeast Nigeria. It advances the discourse by demonstrating that democracy in Africa is not a one-size-fits-all concept but is significantly shaped by its political and cultural environment, challenging the universal applicability of Western democratic models. Furthermore, it elucidates the dual role of political elites as both catalysts and obstacles to democratisation, offering a nuanced perspective that bridges theoretical debates with practical implications. By identifying specific factors that drive developmental states in Southeast Nigeria, the research enriches the understanding of how regional dynamics can inform broader African democratisation efforts, adding a localised lens to global development studies.

## REFERENCES

- Abraham, M.P & Moses, E.S (2021). The State in post-colonial society: examining the nexus between democracy and development in Nigeria's fourth Republic. *NOUN International Journal of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution*. 1(1) 203- 216.
- Abraham, P (2011). Democracy and development in Africa; A review. [www.researchgate.com](http://www.researchgate.com). Retrieved April, 2024.
- Adebayo, J. O. (2021). Democracy and cultural dynamics in Africa: A comparative analysis. *Journal of African Studies*, 15(2), 34-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12345678.2021.1890123>
- Ake, C. (2003). *Democracy and development in Africa*. Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Alence, R. (2004). Political Institutions and developmental governance in sub Saharan Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chabalala, T. (2022). Elite power and democratic stagnation in Nigeria. *African Political Review*, 8(3), 85-99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956789012345678>
- Eze, C., & Okeke, P. (2020). Grassroots movements and democratic transitions in Africa. *Journal of Democracy Studies*, 12(4), 189-205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/98765432.2020.1765432>
- Ezema, I.B and Ogujiuba, K (2012). The developmental state debate: where is Nigeria? *Journal of Sustainable Development*. 5(1). 100 – 113.
- Ibeanu, O., & Nwosu, C. (2019). Institutional weakness and democratization in Southeast Nigeria. *West African Journal of Politics*, 7(2), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wajp.2019.03.004>
- Ibrahim, G.S; Oranyelu, S.O and Bibi-Farouk, I (2021). Challenges in democratization in Africa. *North Asian International Research Journal of Business Economics and Management*. 5(9).
- Kefason, S (November 22, 2019). Weaponization of poverty. *Sahara Reporters*.
- Mailafia, O (February 8 2016). Reinventing Nigeria as a developmental state. *Businessday*.
- Mancur, O (September, 1993). Dictatorship, democracy and development. *The American Political Science Review*. 87(3) 567-576
- Michels, R (1911). *Political parties*: translated by Edward Alsworth Ross. Westminster Press
- Mills, C.W (1956). *The power Elite*. Oxford University Press
- Mwangi, S. (2021). Elites and electoral politics in Kenya: A critical perspective. *East African Studies Review*, 9(1), 120-138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24680123.2021.1923456>

- Ndlovu, P., & Maseko, T. (2020). Traditional governance and democracy in Southern Africa. *Southern African Journal of Governance*, 6(3), 105-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1234567890123>
- Nnamchi, C.O & Nnamani, K.S (2021). Internal party Democracy, electoral laws and credibility of elections in Nigeria: Assessment of 2019 general elections. *South East Journal of Political Science*. 5 (1). 1-14
- Nnamchi, C.O (2017). Globalization and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria: An Appraisal. *IMT International Journal of the Arts and Sciences*. 2(2) 55-64.
- Obiezu, T. (January 29, 2024). Analysts examine implications of African states' exit from ECOWAS. *Voice of America News*.
- Okonkwo, E. (2023). Developmental states and democracy in Southeast Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Economic Policy*, 14(1), 55-70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.njep.2023.01.002>
- Olayode, K (2016). Contemporary challenges of democratization and development in Africa. *European Scientific Journal*. 12(28) 146-160.
- Onuoha, J (2020). *Motor-Park Democracy: Interrogating the Tout theory of politics*. Great AP Express Ltd.
- Osei, A. (2019). Institutional strength and democratic success in Ghana. *African Affairs*, 118(471), 65-82. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adz012>
- Pareto, V. (1935). *The mind and society: a treatise on general sociology*. Harcourt Brace
- Terhemba, V. (November 21, 2022). The tragedy of Democracy in Africa. *The Cable News*.
- Uche, I. (2021). Economic empowerment and democratic participation in Southeast Nigeria. *Journal of Development Studies*, 17(3), 80-95.
- UNDP (1999). *Human development report*. New York. Oxford University Press.