

Theorising a Neo-Elite Framework: The Inverted Pyramid Model

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ABSTRACT

Classical elite theory explains political power as concentrated in the hands of a relatively small ruling minority, but its traditional emphasis on cohesive and hierarchical elites is less adequate for analysing contemporary governance characterised by networks, institutional complexity and expanded public participation. This paper develops the Inverted Pyramid Model as a neo-elite framework for explaining how broad political participation can coexist with persistent elite control. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data from scholarly literature, policy documents and relevant empirical studies, analysed through thematic desk analysis. The findings indicate that contemporary democratic systems may expand opportunities for electoral participation, civil society engagement and media expression without producing proportional influence over substantive policy decisions. Political power therefore appears broadly distributed at the participatory level while remaining concentrated within interconnected formal and informal elite networks. The Inverted Pyramid Model captures this apparent contradiction by distinguishing between the breadth of participation and the depth of decision-making power. The paper argues that democratic inclusion does not necessarily guarantee equal political influence, particularly where institutional structures, economic resources, elite networks and informal mechanisms shape access to decision-making. It concludes that the model extends classical elite theory by providing a context-sensitive explanation of the coexistence of mass participation and elite dominance, while highlighting the importance of institutional accountability, transparency and meaningful civic engagement.

Keywords: Elite Theory, Governance, Inverted Pyramid Model, Neo-Elite Theory, Political Sociology, Power Structure,

INTRODUCTION

Political power is central to the organisation of every society because it determines who makes authoritative decisions, how collective resources are allocated, and whose interests are reflected in public policy. Although political systems differ in their institutions and procedures, a recurring question in political analysis concerns the extent to which power is broadly distributed among citizens or concentrated in the hands of a relatively small group. This tension between popular participation and concentrated authority provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between political elites and the wider population. It also raises a continuing question about whether the expansion of democratic institutions necessarily produces a corresponding redistribution of substantive political power. From a global perspective, the distribution of political and economic power has historically been concentrated in the hands of a relatively small minority, a phenomenon extensively examined by classical elite theorists such as Vilfredo Pareto (1916, 1935), Gaetano Mosca (1896, 1939), and Robert Michels (1911, 1962). Across different historical periods, from aristocratic rule in pre-industrial Europe to the dominance of corporate and political elites in the modern era, elite control has remained a consistent feature of governance systems. In the United States, works such as *The Power Elite* illustrate how political, military, and economic elites have historically converged to shape major policy decisions. At the global level, contemporary inequality further underscores this pattern, with estimates suggesting that the top 1% of the world's population controls a disproportionately large share of global wealth (Oxfam International, 2023).

In Africa, elite power has evolved through colonial and post-colonial transformations. During the colonial period, authority was concentrated in the hands of European administrators and a limited class of local intermediaries. Following independence, many African states witnessed the emergence of political and military elites who centralised authority within authoritarian or single-party systems (Ake, 1996). Since the 1990s democratization wave, the introduction of multiparty elections, civil society

organisations, and expanded media access has suggested a move toward greater inclusion. However, empirical evidence indicates that elite networks continue to play a decisive role in shaping political outcomes in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa (Joseph, 1987; Cheeseman, 2015). In Nigeria, this paradox between democratic participation and elite dominance is particularly evident. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has conducted several general elections (1999–2023), providing a basis for evaluating voter participation trends. Average voter turnout over this period is estimated at approximately 48.12% (Babajide Owonikoko & Ashindorbe, 2025), indicating that less than half of eligible voters consistently participate in elections.

Despite the formal expansion of democratic processes, political power remains heavily influenced by entrenched elites operating through patronage systems, godfatherism, and economic leverage (Olarinmoye, 2008). Elite dominance in candidate selection and policymaking illustrates how formal democratic institutions can coexist with informal mechanisms of control, resulting in a system where participation is broad but meaningful power remains concentrated. This reality exposes limitations in classical elite theory, which tends to conceptualise elites as cohesive, clearly identifiable, and hierarchically organised actors exerting direct control over passive masses. While useful in explaining earlier political systems, this framework struggles to account for contemporary governance structures characterised by institutional complexity, networked authority, and indirect forms of influence. The expansion of digital media, multinational corporations, and global governance institutions has further diffused visible centres of power, making elite influence more dispersed yet still significant (Castells, 2009, 2010, 2011).

The central problem, therefore, is the inability of classical elite theory to adequately explain the coexistence of widespread participatory institutions and the persistent concentration of decision-making power. Modern governance systems often project inclusivity while substantive authority remains concentrated through indirect and institutionalised mechanisms. This paper aims to address this gap by critiquing classical elite theory and proposing a more context-sensitive analytical framework through the Inverted Pyramid Model. By doing so, it seeks to explain how contemporary systems simultaneously accommodate mass participation and sustain elite dominance. Methodologically, the paper relies on qualitative analysis of secondary data, and its contribution lies in advancing theoretical understanding while offering practical insights into governance, accountability, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria and comparable contexts.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Neo-Elite Framework

The concept of a neo-elite framework refers to an approach that reinterprets elite power in response to transformations in contemporary political, economic and institutional structures. Pareto (1916/1935) conceptualised elites as minorities possessing the capacities required to occupy governing or influential positions, while Mosca (1896, 1939) viewed political organisation as producing a ruling minority over a less organised majority. Michels (1911, 1962) similarly argued that organisational complexity tends to generate oligarchic leadership. Mills (1956) subsequently demonstrated how political, corporate and military elites could become interconnected, while Castells (2009) shifted attention towards networked forms of power operating across institutions and societies. These perspectives collectively establish the persistence of unequal influence but differ regarding its organisation. Their limitation is that classical formulations tend to privilege identifiable elites, whereas contemporary power can operate through fluid networks and institutional interdependence. The neo-elite framework therefore conceptualises contemporary elites as interconnected actors whose influence may be dispersed institutionally but concentrated in outcomes. The present study consequently extends elite theory from the analysis of ruling minorities to the analysis of networked, mediated and less visible forms of elite influence.

The neo-elite framework is therefore understood in this study as an analytical extension of classical elite theory rather than a rejection of it. Its central proposition is that elite dominance has not disappeared with democratisation; rather, its structure, mechanisms and visibility have changed. Contemporary elites may exercise influence through political institutions, economic resources, professional expertise, media, organised interests and informal networks. This interpretation is consistent with Gilens and Page's (2014) quantitative evidence that economic elites and business-oriented interest

groups exerted substantial independent influence on United States policy, while average citizens exercised comparatively little independent influence. The neo-elite perspective therefore shifts the question from simply asking who constitutes the elite? to asking how influence is organised, mediated and translated into consequential decisions. It provides the theoretical foundation upon which the Inverted Pyramid Model is constructed.

Inverted Pyramid Model

The Inverted Pyramid Model is proposed in this paper as a conceptual representation of the relationship between the breadth of political participation and the concentration of substantive decision-making power. Its intellectual foundations can be traced through five important perspectives. Pareto (1916, 1935) emphasised the continuing circulation of elites; Mosca (1896/1939) identified the organisational advantage of minorities; Michels (1911, 1962) demonstrated the tendency of democratic organisations towards oligarchic leadership; Mills (1956) located strategic power within interconnected institutional elites; and Castells (2009) demonstrated that contemporary power increasingly operates through networks rather than solely through hierarchical structures. The model synthesises these insights but departs from a simple elite–mass dichotomy. It proposes that modern democratic systems can produce a broad participatory base comprising voters, civil society, media users and citizens, while substantive authority narrows towards relatively small networks capable of influencing strategic decisions. The model therefore represents an apparent expansion of participation alongside a relative concentration of effective influence.

The Inverted Pyramid Model consequently rests on a central distinction between participation and power. A large number of citizens may participate in elections, public debate, civil society activities and digital communication without possessing equivalent capacity to determine policy outcomes. This proposition does not imply that citizens are completely powerless or that democratic institutions are merely symbolic. Rather, it suggests that participation operates at different levels of political influence. Evidence from Gilens and Page (2014), for example, demonstrates that average citizens' preferences had little independent effect on policy when economic elites and organised interests were considered simultaneously. The model therefore conceptualises contemporary democracy as potentially having a wide participatory surface but a narrower zone of substantive decision-making. Its contribution lies in explaining this apparent contradiction without assuming that all elites constitute a unified ruling class. Instead, elite influence may emerge through interconnected networks, institutional positions, economic resources and informal mechanisms. The Inverted Pyramid Model thus provides a framework for analysing how democratic inclusion and elite concentration can coexist within the same political system.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical scholarship on political elites has consistently examined the relationship between the formal distribution of political authority and the actual distribution of influence within political systems. Early empirical work provided important evidence that political power tends to be concentrated among actors occupying strategically positioned institutions, although subsequent studies have demonstrated that the structure of elite power is more complex than the existence of a single, cohesive ruling class. This literature is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides evidence for examining whether contemporary democratic participation has fundamentally redistributed political influence or merely changed the manner in which elite power is exercised.

One of the foundational empirical contributions is C. Wright Mills' (1956) *The Power Elite*. Although the work predates contemporary conventions of empirical research, it was based on historical and institutional analysis supplemented by first-hand information from individuals familiar with the federal government, military and major corporations. Mills (1956) examined the institutional positions and relationships of political, military and corporate leaders in the United States and argued that these three institutional orders had become sufficiently interconnected to constitute a powerful national elite. . Mills (1956) central finding was that major decisions affecting American society could be significantly influenced by actors occupying the highest positions within these institutions. The . Mills (1956) work was important because it moved elite analysis beyond the study of formal political office and demonstrated how power could operate through institutional interconnections. However, its principal limitation is that it conceptualised elite power largely through a relatively identifiable and vertically structured configuration of institutional leadership. This makes the framework less adequate for analysing

contemporary environments in which influence is distributed across political parties, corporations, bureaucracies, civil society organisations, media institutions and transnational networks. The present study differs from Mills (1956) by shifting the analytical focus from the identification of a relatively cohesive power elite to the relationship between the breadth of participation and the concentration of substantive decision-making authority. Rather than assuming that elite power must be visibly centralised, the study examines how it can remain concentrated while appearing institutionally dispersed. Mills (1956) empirical approach has nevertheless remained influential in subsequent elite research, particularly because it demonstrated that the study of political power requires attention to relationships among institutional actors rather than to formal constitutional structures alone.

A more explicitly quantitative examination was undertaken by Gilens and Page (2014) in their study, *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*. The researchers employed a quantitative research design based on a unique dataset covering 1,779 policy issues in the United States and used multivariate statistical analysis to compare the independent influence of average citizens, economic elites and organised interest groups on policy outcomes. Their findings indicated that economic elites and business-oriented interest groups had substantial independent effects on government policy, whereas average citizens and mass-based interest groups had little or no independent influence after the preferences of other actors were taken into account. The Gilens and Page (2014) study provides strong empirical evidence that formal democratic institutions do not necessarily produce equal influence over public policy. Its major strength lies in its systematic quantitative testing of competing theoretical explanations rather than relying exclusively on descriptive accounts of elite dominance. Nevertheless, the Gilens and Page (2014) study is geographically restricted to the United States and concentrates on policy outcomes rather than examining the broader mechanisms through which political participation and elite influence coexist. Gilens and Page (2014) study therefore provides limited explanation of how citizens may participate extensively in elections and public discourse while remaining comparatively weak in substantive decision-making. The present study addresses this limitation by moving beyond the question of which actor has the greatest influence to examine the structural relationship between widespread participation and concentrated authority. The Gilens and Page (2014) study also seeks to apply the argument to Nigeria, where informal political networks, patronage, candidate selection and institutional practices may shape elite influence differently from the American context.

Evidence from European policymaking provides a further illustration of how participation and influence can coexist unequally. Coen and Richardson (2009), in their edited empirical volume *Lobbying the European Union: Institutions, Actors, and Issues*, brought together studies examining interest groups, lobbying institutions, access to European Union decision-making structures and the strategies used by organised interests. The volume draws upon institutional analysis, comparative case studies and empirical studies of interest-group access and mobilisation. Its introductory study, *Learning to Lobby the European Union: 20 Years of Change*, notes the substantial growth of EU lobbying and examines changes in interest-group organisation, mobilisation strategies and access to EU institutions. The wider volume demonstrates that participation in policymaking is not simply a question of whether actors have formal access; differences in resources, organisation, expertise and institutional access affect their capacity to influence policy. The strength of this work is that it demonstrates empirically how apparently pluralistic policymaking can contain unequal patterns of influence. However, its focus is principally on organised interest groups and institutional lobbying within the EU rather than on the broader relationship between mass political participation and elite control. It also does not directly address the Nigerian political environment, where informal networks and personalised political relationships can be particularly significant. The present study therefore extends this insight by examining not only organised access to institutions but also the broader distinction between participation as visibility and participation as effective influence. This distinction is central to the proposed Inverted Pyramid Model.

In the Nigerian context, Olarinmoye's (2008) study, *Godfathers, Political Parties and Electoral Corruption in Nigeria*, provides particularly relevant empirical evidence concerning the relationship between political participation, political parties and elite brokerage. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, drawing on documentary and historical analysis of Nigerian political parties, electoral competition and the activities of political godfathers. Rather than treating electoral corruption simply as the consequence of individual greed, Olarinmoye (2008) demonstrates how the organisational weakness of political parties, the zero-sum character of electoral competition and the limited capacity of parties to mobilise voters create conditions in which political godfathers become important brokers.

Olarinmoye's (2008) argues that these actors use their knowledge of local voting structures, patronage and political resources to facilitate electoral success while simultaneously developing interests in the political system they help to construct. The Olarinmoye (2008) study is valuable because it demonstrates that elite influence in Nigeria does not operate exclusively through formal political institutions; it can also operate through informal brokerage, patronage and control of electoral networks. Its limitation, however, is that it focuses heavily on godfatherism and electoral corruption and was conducted within the political circumstances of the period preceding and immediately following the 2007 elections. It consequently does not provide a comprehensive explanation of contemporary forms of elite influence associated with digital communication, social media, expanding civil society activity and increasingly complex political and economic networks. The Olarinmoye (2008) study differs by treating godfatherism as only one possible mechanism of elite influence and by developing a broader framework for explaining how mass participation can coexist with elite concentration across formal and informal institutions.

The empirical significance of electoral participation in Nigeria is further illustrated by official electoral evidence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2024) reported that Nigeria had 93,469,008 registered voters for the 2023 general election (Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], 2024), representing a substantial expansion of the country's formal electoral base. Nevertheless, participation in the presidential election remained comparatively low. INEC recorded 25,286,616 accredited voters and 24,965,218 votes cast, while its report calculated turnout at 27.05 per cent based on accredited voters (INEC, 2024). Using the standard registered-voter denominator employed by the International IDEA Voter Turnout Database (n.d.), the 2023 presidential election recorded a turnout of 26.71 per cent, compared with 34.75 per cent in 2019, 43.65 per cent in 2015, and 69.08 per cent in 2003 (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [International IDEA], n.d.). These figures should not, however, be interpreted as direct evidence of elite domination. Electoral turnout is an indicator of political participation rather than a direct measure of the distribution of political power. Low participation may reflect political apathy, distrust in political institutions, insecurity, logistical and institutional barriers, dissatisfaction with candidates, or broader perceptions of electoral credibility. Indeed, International IDEA (n.d.) reported that the 2023 election had only about 27 per cent turnout and noted concerns surrounding logistical failures, irregularities and transparency. Consequently, the present study treats declining electoral participation as contextual evidence of the changing relationship between democratic inclusion and political participation, rather than as conclusive proof of elite domination. The analysis therefore considers electoral participation alongside the organisation of political parties, elite networks, institutional access, economic resources and informal mechanisms of influence. This approach provides a more cautious and theoretically defensible basis for examining how broad formal participation can coexist with comparatively concentrated political influence.

The economic dimension of elite concentration is also relevant to the empirical literature. Oxfam International's (2023) *Survival of the Richest: How We Must Tax the Super-Rich Now to Fight Inequality* employed quantitative analysis of international wealth data, including Forbes billionaire data and other established datasets, to examine the distribution of global wealth. The report estimated that the richest 1 per cent captured approximately 63 percent of the new wealth created globally between December 2019 and December 2021, while the bottom 99 percent received the remaining 37 percent; it also estimated that the richest 1 per cent held approximately 45.6 percent of global wealth. These findings demonstrate substantial economic concentration, although wealth concentration should not automatically be equated with political control. The report's principal limitation for the present study is therefore conceptual: it measures economic inequality rather than directly measuring political influence or decision-making authority. Nevertheless, it provides relevant contextual evidence for understanding how unequal economic resources can create structural advantages for powerful actors. The present study moves beyond wealth distribution by asking how economic resources, institutional positions, political networks and participatory structures may interact in producing unequal political influence. In this respect, economic concentration is treated as one possible resource underpinning elite power rather than as a sufficient explanation of political domination.

Taken together, the reviewed empirical literature demonstrates that elite influence remains observable across different political and institutional contexts, but it does not necessarily operate in the simple form of a small, unified and visibly dominant ruling class. Mills' (1956) institutional analysis identified interconnected political, military and corporate power; Gilens and Page (2014) quantitatively demonstrated the disproportionate policy influence of economic elites and business-oriented interest

groups; Coen and Richardson (2009) showed how institutional access and organisational resources affect influence within EU policymaking; Olarinmoye (2008) demonstrated the importance of informal brokerage and godfatherism in Nigerian electoral politics; official Nigerian electoral data reveal a substantial gap between the size of the registered electorate and actual electoral participation; while Oxfam's (2023) quantitative evidence illustrates the continuing concentration of economic resources.

Despite these contributions, an important gap remains. Much of the existing empirical literature examines elite influence, economic concentration, lobbying, electoral corruption or voter participation separately. Less attention has been devoted to explaining the structural paradox in which political participation may become increasingly broad while substantive decision-making remains concentrated among relatively small and interconnected networks. The existing literature also provides limited conceptual integration between formal participation and informal mechanisms of control within the same analytical framework, particularly in the Nigerian context. The present study addresses this gap through the Inverted Pyramid Model, which does not assume that participation and elite dominance are mutually exclusive. Instead, it conceptualises contemporary political power as having a broad participatory surface but a progressively narrower concentration of substantive influence. The study therefore moves beyond merely demonstrating that elites possess power and seeks to explain how the expansion of democratic participation can coexist with the continued concentration of meaningful decision-making authority. This constitutes the distinctive empirical and conceptual contribution of the study.

GAP IN THE LITERATURE

The empirical literature reviewed demonstrates that the concentration of political influence remains an important feature of contemporary governance, but it also shows that the nature and mechanisms of elite power have changed. Mills' (1956) *The Power Elite* established the importance of examining relationships among political, military and economic institutions, while Gilens and Page's (2014) *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens* provided quantitative evidence that economic elites and organised interest groups can exert substantial influence on public policy. Similarly, Coen and Richardson's (2009) *Lobbying the European Union: Institutions, Actors, and Issues* demonstrate the importance of institutional access, lobbying and organised interests in contemporary policymaking, while Olarinmoye's (2008) *Godfathers, Political Parties and Electoral Corruption in Nigeria* illustrates how informal political networks and godfatherism can influence electoral competition in Nigeria.

Despite these important contributions, three related gaps remain. First, existing empirical studies tend to examine particular sources or mechanisms of elite influence separately. Gilens and Page (2014) focus principally on the relative influence of economic elites, interest groups and ordinary citizens in the United States; Coen and Richardson examine lobbying and institutional intermediation within the European Union; while Olarinmoye concentrates on godfatherism, political parties and electoral corruption in Nigeria. These studies provide valuable evidence of unequal influence, but they do not sufficiently integrate formal and informal mechanisms of power into a single explanation of how contemporary political participation can coexist with elite dominance. The present study addresses this gap by examining political power across elections, political institutions, economic resources, organisational networks and informal relationships rather than treating any one mechanism as a complete explanation of elite control.

Second, the existing literature provides considerable evidence that elites exercise disproportionate influence, but comparatively less attention is given to the paradox between the expansion of participation and the persistence of concentrated decision-making power. Contemporary democratic systems have widened opportunities for citizens to vote, join political parties, participate in civil society, communicate through digital media and express political preferences. However, the existence of these participatory opportunities does not necessarily mean that citizens exercise equivalent influence over strategic political decisions. The central issue is therefore not simply whether participation exists, but whether the distribution of participation corresponds with the distribution of substantive political power. This distinction is insufficiently developed in the empirical literature reviewed.

Third, there is a contextual and conceptual gap concerning Nigeria. Existing Nigerian scholarship provides useful explanations of patronage, godfatherism and electoral influence, but much of this literature concentrates on specific electoral practices or individual mechanisms of elite reproduction. Olarinmoye's study, for example, provides an important explanation of how weak party organisation and

the logic of electoral competition create conditions in which godfathers become influential political brokers. However, this does not fully explain how such informal mechanisms interact with formal democratic institutions, economic power, institutional structures and broader networks of influence in contemporary Nigeria. The present study therefore extends the Nigerian discussion beyond godfatherism and electoral corruption to examine the wider structural relationship between mass participation and elite decision-making.

The literature also reveals a conceptual gap in the way elite power is represented. Classical elite approaches generally conceptualise political power in terms of a relatively small minority exercising control over a larger majority. Contemporary governance, however, is characterised by multiple institutions, overlapping networks, organised interests and diverse channels of participation. The empirical evidence therefore suggests that elite power may be less visibly hierarchical and more networked than classical formulations imply. The problem is not that classical elite theory is no longer useful, but that its conventional representation of the elite–mass relationship requires refinement to account for circumstances in which political participation becomes increasingly broad while substantive influence remains comparatively concentrated. It is this intersection between participation and concentration that constitutes the principal gap addressed by the present study. Existing empirical studies have established that powerful actors can exercise disproportionate influence, but they provide less systematic explanation of how this influence can persist within political systems that simultaneously expand formal opportunities for mass participation.

The present study consequently proposes the Inverted Pyramid Model as a conceptual extension of elite theory. The model distinguishes between the breadth of participation and the depth of decision-making power: participation may involve a large proportion of society, whereas substantive authority over critical political and policy decisions may remain concentrated within relatively narrow and interconnected elite networks. Accordingly, the contribution of this study is not to claim that previous scholarship has overlooked elite dominance, nor to argue that democratic participation is merely an illusion. Rather, it seeks to explain a more specific empirical and theoretical paradox: why the expansion of participatory institutions does not necessarily produce a corresponding diffusion of substantive political power. By bringing together formal participation, informal networks, institutional access, economic resources and elite decision-making within a single analytical framework, the Inverted Pyramid Model seeks to provide a more context-sensitive explanation of contemporary elite dominance, particularly within Nigeria and comparable democratic settings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elite Theory

Elite theory broadly refers to the analytical framework which posits that a small, organised minority exercises disproportionate control over political and economic decision-making within society. Early formulations by Pareto (1916, 1935) conceptualise elites as individuals who occupy the highest positions of influence due to superior capabilities, arguing that societies are always governed by a minority whose composition may change but whose dominance persists. Similarly, Mosca (1896, 1939) defines elites as the “ruling class” that monopolises political power through organisational advantage, while Michels (1911, 1962) advances the “iron law of oligarchy”, asserting that all complex organisations inevitably produce leadership concentration. In the American context, The Power Elite extends this argument by identifying a triangulated elite composed of political, corporate, and military leaders. Dahl (1961), however, offers a pluralist critique, suggesting that power is distributed among competing groups rather than monopolised by a single elite, although later empirical studies have challenged this optimism. More recently, Higley and Burton (2006) conceptualise elites as cohesive networks capable of maintaining political stability through negotiated settlements.

Critically, while these perspectives differ in emphasis, they converge on the central proposition that power is structurally unequal. However, classical formulations often overstate elite cohesion and visibility, neglecting the increasingly complex, networked, and institutionalised nature of power in contemporary societies. From this review, it can be deduced that elite theory remains analytically relevant but requires conceptual refinement to capture the dispersed yet coordinated forms of elite influence evident today.

Classical Elite Theory (Limitations)

Despite its foundational significance, classical elite theory exhibits several limitations when applied to contemporary governance systems. First, it assumes that elite control is direct, visible, and hierarchical. Pareto (1916/1935) and Mosca (1896, 1939), for instance, envisaged elites as clearly identifiable ruling groups, an assumption that does not fully align with modern governance characterised by layered institutions and indirect influence. Second, classical theory underestimates institutional complexity. As Weber (1922, 1978) demonstrates in his analysis of bureaucracy, modern states operate through intricate administrative systems that mediate and sometimes obscure elite control. Third, the theory largely ignores the role of symbolic participation and legitimacy mechanisms. Gramsci (1971) introduces the concept of cultural hegemony, showing how elites maintain dominance not merely through coercion but through consent, shaping norms and beliefs. Similarly, Foucault (1980) reconceptualises power as diffuse and embedded within discourses and practices rather than concentrated solely in identifiable actors. In contemporary political sociology, Castells (2009, 2010, 2011) further highlights how power operates through networks, particularly in the digital age.

Empirical evidence reinforces these limitations. For example, while democratic institutions such as elections and civil society organisations have expanded globally since the 1990s, policy outcomes often continue to reflect elite preferences (Gilens & Page, 2014). This suggests that classical elite theory inadequately accounts for the coexistence of participation and control. From this analysis, it can be deduced that classical elite theory requires revision to incorporate indirect, networked, and symbolic forms of power that define modern governance.

This paper is anchored in classical elite theory as articulated by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels, whose foundational works collectively emphasise the inevitability of minority rule in all organised societies. Pareto's (1916/1935) notion of the "circulation of elites" suggests that while elites may change over time, the structure of elite dominance remains constant. Mosca (1896, 1939) similarly posits the existence of a "ruling class" that monopolises political power, while Michels (1911, 1962), through his "iron law of oligarchy", argues that all complex organisations, including democratic ones, tend towards oligarchic control. Historically, the core propositions of classical elite theory found strong empirical grounding in early twentieth-century Europe, where aristocratic and bourgeois elites exercised disproportionate control over political institutions and economic resources. In countries such as the United Kingdom and France, political authority the expansion of universal suffrage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely confined to landed elites and industrial capitalists. For example, in Britain before the full implementation of electoral reforms between 1832 and 1918, less than 30% of adult males had the right to vote, and political office was overwhelmingly occupied by members of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie (Evans, 2000). Similarly, in pre-First World War France, parliamentary representation was dominated by economic elites, with limited working-class participation despite the formal establishment of republican institutions. These patterns reflect Mosca's (1896/1939) assertion that a ruling minority maintains control through organisational advantage and resource dominance.

By the mid-twentieth century, particularly during the Cold War period (circa 1945–1991), elite dominance became more institutionalised and empirically observable in advanced industrial societies. A landmark paper is *The Power Elite*, which documented how a relatively small and interconnected group of individuals occupied strategic leadership positions across the political, military, and corporate sectors in the United States. Mills (1956) identified approximately 7,000 individuals who held key command posts within what he termed the "power elite", including top executives of major corporations, senior military officers, and high-ranking government officials. For instance, by the early 1950s, the largest 100 corporations in the United States controlled nearly half of all corporate assets, and their executives frequently rotated into government positions, particularly within defence and economic policy institutions (Watts, 2008). The overlap between corporate leadership and state power was especially evident during the Eisenhower administration (1953–1961), where several cabinet members had direct ties to major business enterprises and military-industrial interests. Further empirical evidence from this period underscores the concentration of decision-making authority. During the early Cold War, U.S. defence spending experienced a dramatic surge, rising from approximately \$13.5 billion in 1948 to over \$50 billion annually by 1953. This rapid increase was driven by the onset of the US-Soviet Cold War, the policy of containment, and specifically the impact of the Korean War (1950–1953) (Office of Management and

Budget, 2022; Watts, 2008). This period marked the establishment of a permanent, large-scale armaments industry and a close, enduring alliance between political leaders, military personnel, and private contractors, a phenomenon later famously termed the "military-industrial complex. This consolidation of power was not merely structural but also social, as elite actors often shared similar educational backgrounds, attending institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and West Point, and participating in exclusive policy-planning networks like the Council on Foreign Relations. Such patterns reinforce Pareto's (1916, 1935) notion of elite circulation within a relatively closed social stratum, as well as Michels' (1911, 1962) argument that organisational complexity inevitably leads to leadership concentration. However, the explanatory power of classical elite theory becomes less adequate when applied to contemporary governance systems characterised by institutional complexity, globalisation, and the proliferation of participatory mechanisms.

From the late twentieth century onwards, particularly after the "third wave" of democratisation in the 1990s, many states across Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe adopted multiparty elections, decentralisation reforms, and expanded civil society engagement. In Nigeria, for example, the transition to civilian rule in 1999 marked a significant expansion of formal democratic participation, with over 93 million registered voters by the 2023 general elections (INEC, 2023). Yet, despite these developments, political outcomes often continue to be shaped by entrenched elite networks. Empirical evidence indicates that candidate selection within major political parties is frequently influenced by powerful "godfathers," while campaign financing remains heavily reliant on wealthy patrons (Olarinmoye, 2008). This pattern suggests that although political participation may have expanded in form, the substantive distribution of power has not correspondingly broadened.

At the global level, the growing influence of transnational corporations and financial institutions further complicates classical assumptions about elite cohesion. According to Roach (2023), multinational corporations constitute a substantial component of the global economy. By 2022, there were tens of thousands of multinational firms operating worldwide, including dozens with annual revenues exceeding \$100 billion and over a thousand firms earning between \$10 billion and \$100 billion. Among the world's largest 2,000 corporations, the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Canada host a significant concentration, with approximately three-quarters of these firms located in just ten countries. These corporations span diverse sectors, with banking, financial services, construction, materials, and oil and gas among the most represented industries (John Roach, 2023; UNCTAD, 2022). The dispersion of economic power across such extensive networks challenges the notion of a single, unified elite, yet it does not eliminate the concentration of influence. Rather, it suggests a more fragmented but interconnected elite configuration that operates across national and institutional boundaries. Additionally, the expansion of digital platforms and media conglomerates since the early 2000s has introduced new actors into elite structures, shaping public opinion and political discourse in less visible but highly impactful ways (Castells, 2009, 2010, 2011).

It is within this context that the Inverted Pyramid Model is advanced as a theoretical extension of classical elite theory. While retaining the core insight that power is concentrated, the model challenges the traditional linear and top-down representation by introducing the idea of structural inversion. In contemporary systems, the visible structure of governance appears broad and participatory, encompassing elections, civil society organisations, media engagement, and decentralised institutions, thereby forming the wide upper layer of the pyramid. Beneath this, however, lies a narrowing structure of intermediaries and, ultimately, a small core elite that exercises decisive control over key political and economic decisions. This inversion reflects the disjuncture between perceived and actual power: the masses appear empowered at the surface, yet substantive authority remains concentrated at the base. Furthermore, the model incorporates the concept of symbolic participation to explain how legitimacy is maintained. Participatory processes, such as elections and public consultations, often function not only as mechanisms of inclusion but also as instruments for legitimising elite decisions. For example, despite regular electoral cycles in many democracies, voter turnout has declined or remained moderate; Nigeria's turnout in 2023 was approximately 27%, one of the lowest since 1999 (INEC, 2023), raising questions about the depth of citizen engagement. At the same time, policy continuity across administrations frequently indicates the enduring influence of elite interests, irrespective of electoral outcomes. Comparable patterns can be observed in other contexts, such as South Africa, where dominant party structures and economic elites continue to shape policy directions despite competitive elections (Cheeseman, 2015). Thus, the Inverted Pyramid Model builds upon the foundational insights of classical elite theory while adapting them to the

empirical realities of contemporary governance. By integrating perspectives from political sociology and network theory, it provides a more flexible and context-sensitive framework for analysing power. It accounts for both the expansion of participatory structures and the persistence of elite dominance, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of modern political systems across historical and geographical contexts.

Inverted Pyramid Model

The Inverted Pyramid Model is proposed as a conceptual refinement of elite theory, designed to address its classical limitations by capturing the inversion between perceived and actual power structures. At the surface level, the model presents a broad, expansive layer representing the masses and participatory institutions, including elections, civil society, media platforms, and decentralised governance structures. This aligns with Dahl's (1961) pluralist emphasis on participation and the apparent diffusion of power. However, beneath this visible layer lies a progressively narrowing structure of intermediaries: bureaucracies, political parties, and interest groups that filter and channel influence. At the base, the model identifies a small, cohesive core elite that exercises decisive control over strategic decisions, consistent with insights from *The Power Elite* and contemporary analyses of elite networks (Higley & Burton, 2006). The model also incorporates Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony and Castells' (2009, 2010) concept of networked power to explain how legitimacy is maintained through symbolic participation. For instance, widespread electoral processes and media engagement create an impression of inclusivity, even as substantive decision-making remains centralised. Empirical patterns, such as declining voter turnout in many democracies and the persistent influence of wealthy donors and political patrons, support this interpretation. Critically, the Inverted Pyramid Model does not reject elite theory but extends it by reconciling the apparent contradiction between mass participation and elite dominance. It acknowledges that while participation has expanded in form, control remains concentrated in substance. From this synthesis, it can be deduced that the model provides a more dynamic and context-sensitive framework for understanding contemporary power relations, particularly in societies where democratic institutions coexist with entrenched elite influence.

METHODOLOGY

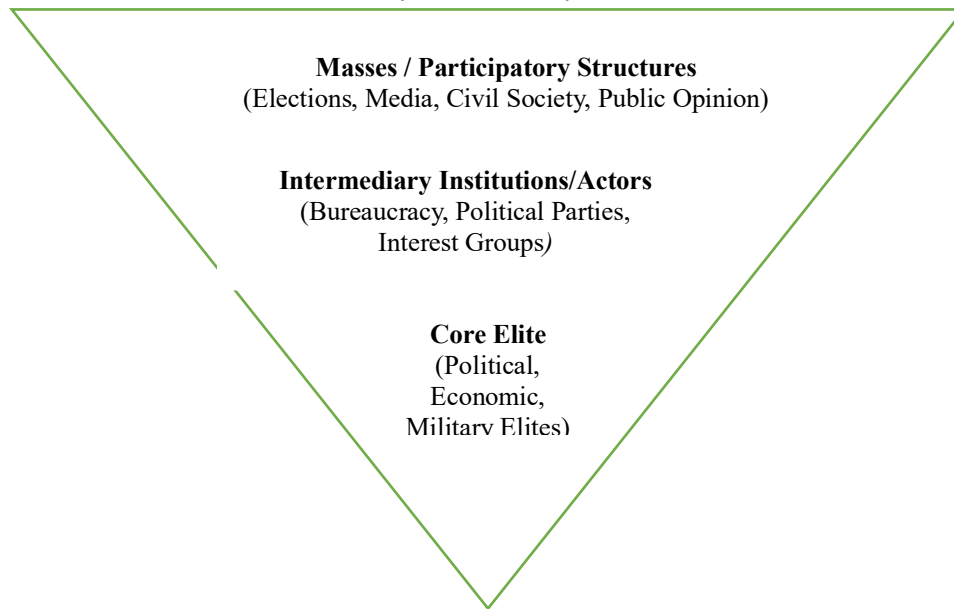
This paper adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist–constructivist philosophical orientation, which views power relations and governance structures as socially constructed and context-dependent (Creswell, 2014). Rather than seeking causal generalisations, the paper aims to interpret how elite dominance is produced, sustained, and legitimised within contemporary political systems. This approach is particularly suited to examining complex and often concealed dynamics of power that are not easily quantifiable. The analysis draws on secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and historical records. These materials provide a broad empirical and theoretical base spanning different historical periods and geographical contexts. Key texts on elite theory and political sociology are complemented by institutional reports and contemporary data to ensure relevance and depth. Desk analysis serves as the principal analytical method, facilitating the systematic identification, comparison and interpretation of recurring themes, including power concentration, institutional mediation and symbolic participation (Krippendorff, 2018). Relevant patterns of elite influence are critically examined and synthesised to inform the development of the Inverted Pyramid Model. Triangulation is employed by comparing evidence from diverse scholarly and documentary sources to strengthen validity and minimise interpretive bias (Yin, 2018). Reliability is enhanced through consistent analytical procedures and reliance on credible peer-reviewed materials. Ethical standards are maintained through accurate citation, proper acknowledgement of authorship and faithful representation of evidence. Nevertheless, reliance on secondary data and qualitative interpretation may introduce subjectivity and limit generalisability. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides an appropriate basis for addressing the study's objectives and developing its proposed analytical theoretical contribution.

Illustrative Overview of the Neo-Elite Theory: The Inverted Pyramid Model

This section presents the Inverted Pyramid Model as a visual and analytical representation of the neo-elite perspective on power relations in contemporary governance. The model is further unpacked through structured subheadings that explain its key components and dynamics, namely the mass/public

level, intermediary institutions, and the core elite. Each subsection highlights the characteristics and functions of these layers, as well as their roles in shaping the distribution and exercise of political power. Together, the subheadings provide a systematic breakdown of how participation, mediation and elite control interact within modern political systems, offering a clearer understanding of the inverted structure of authority proposed by the model.

Figure 1: Illustration of the Neo-elite Theory: Inverted Pyramid Model



Source: Illustrated by the Author of this paper

As depicted in Figure 1, the Inverted Pyramid Model reconceptualises power relations in contemporary governance by both visually and analytically inverting the conventional hierarchical assumptions underlying classical elite theory. Traditional elite theory, as advanced by thinkers such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels, implicitly relies on an “up-down” or top-down logic in which a relatively cohesive ruling minority exercises direct control over a passive majority. This linear conception of power assumes clear visibility of elites at the apex and a relatively transparent flow of authority downward through formal institutions. However, this assumption has been widely critiqued in modern political analysis as overly simplistic and empirically inadequate, particularly in complex, differentiated, and networked governance systems. As noted by scholars of power such as Lukes (2005), power is not only exercised through overt decision-making but also through agenda-setting and the shaping of preferences, often in ways that are not directly observable. Similarly, Castells (2009, 2010) emphasises that in network societies, power is dispersed across interconnected nodes rather than concentrated in a single hierarchical chain, further undermining the classical up-down model.

In contrast to this linear assumption, the Inverted Pyramid Model demonstrates that modern political systems often present a broad and participatory surface while concentrating decisive authority within a narrow core. At the uppermost and widest level of the structure are the masses and participatory institutions, including elections, civil society organisations, mass media, and public opinion. This expansive layer reflects the apparent inclusivity of contemporary governance systems, particularly following the third wave of democratisation in the 1990s. Nigeria provides a pertinent example: since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the country has conducted regular general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, thereby institutionalising formal channels for citizen participation. However, despite over 93 million registered voters in 2023, voter turnout declined to approximately 27% (Adekoya, 2023). This gap between formal participation and actual engagement highlights a key weakness of the classical up-down approach, which tends to equate institutional participation with meaningful influence. In reality, the mere presence of participatory mechanisms does not guarantee that power flows through them directly or effectively.

Beneath this visible layer lies the intermediary stratum, composed of bureaucratic institutions, political parties, and interest groups, which function as critical mediators between the masses and the elite core. Classical elite theory's up-down model often underestimates the significance of these intermediaries, treating them as neutral conduits rather than active sites of power. Yet empirical studies demonstrate that these institutions play a decisive role in filtering, shaping, and sometimes constraining the preferences expressed at the mass level. Bureaucracies, for instance, possess technical expertise and procedural authority that enable them to influence policy implementation and interpretation, while political parties often control access to candidacy and political office. In Nigeria, elite-controlled nomination processes and patronage networks, commonly referred to as "godfatherism," significantly affect electoral outcomes and governance structures (Olarinmoye, 2008). Similarly, in supranational contexts such as the European Union, lobbying networks and interest groups exert substantial influence over policymaking processes, despite formal commitments to transparency and inclusivity (Coen & Richardson, 2009). These dynamics reveal a major flaw in the up-down assumption: power does not simply descend from elites to masses but is continuously mediated, negotiated, and redistributed across institutional layers, complicating any straightforward hierarchical interpretation.

At the narrow base of the inverted pyramid lies the core elite, comprising political leaders, influential economic actors, and, in some contexts, military or security elites. Although smaller in number, this group wields decisive influence over strategic policy decisions, resource allocation, and long-term governance direction. Historical and contemporary evidence supports the persistence of such elite configurations. In the United States, Mills (1956) documented the convergence of corporate, military, and political leaders into a cohesive "power elite" that shaped national policy during the mid-twentieth century. At the global level, economic concentration further reinforces elite dominance; according to Oxfam International (2023), the wealthiest 1% of the global population controls nearly half of global wealth, enabling them to influence political outcomes through campaign financing, lobbying, and control of strategic industries. In many African contexts, including Nigeria, elite networks maintain their influence through patronage systems, informal alliances, and control over state resources that persist across electoral cycles (Cheeseman, 2015).

Overall, the Inverted Pyramid Model highlights a critical inversion between perceived power and actual power. While the upper layers of the structure suggest openness, participation, and democratic inclusivity, substantive authority remains concentrated within a narrow elite core. This inversion is sustained through institutional complexity, intermediary actors, and symbolic mechanisms that legitimise governance structures while obscuring the concentration of control. The classical elite theory's reliance on a top-down or up-down approach is therefore insufficient, as it fails to capture the indirect, networked, and often opaque pathways through which power is exercised in contemporary systems. By exposing the fallacy of the up-down assumption, the Inverted Pyramid Model provides a more accurate and nuanced framework for analysing modern governance, emphasising the distinction between formal participation and actual decision-making authority.

Table 1: Tabular Representation of the Inverted Pyramid Model

Level	Structure	Characteristics	Role in Power Dynamics
Top (Wide)	Masses / Public	Large, diverse, participatory	Legitimises the system
Middle	Institutions	Bureaucratic and political intermediaries	Transmits and filters influence
Bottom (Narrow)	Core Elite	Small, cohesive, strategic	Controls key decisions

Source: Illustrated by the Author of this paper

Table 1, presents a simplified representation of the Inverted Pyramid Model of power relations (also known as the Neo-Elite Model of Elite Theory), illustrating how authority and decision-making are distributed across three hierarchical levels: the masses (top/wide), intermediary institutions (middle), and the core elite (bottom/narrow). The structure reflects a sociopolitical theory in which power is not evenly distributed but concentrated among a small group of actors who ultimately influence outcomes within a broader participatory system. At the top (wide section), the masses or general public constitute the largest and most diverse segment. Their role is primarily participatory rather than decisional. Through mechanisms such as elections, public opinion, media engagement, and civil society activities, they provide legitimacy to the political system. This aligns with democratic theory, where popular sovereignty underpins governmental authority, even if direct control over policy is limited (Dahl, 1998). The

legitimacy derived from mass participation ensures stability, as governing elites rely on public consent, either active or passive, to sustain their authority.

The middle layer, consisting of institutions such as bureaucracies, political parties, and interest groups, functions as an intermediary. These actors translate mass preferences into policy-relevant inputs while also filtering, moderating, and sometimes reshaping those preferences. Bureaucracies implement decisions, political parties aggregate interests, and interest groups advocate for specific agendas. This intermediary role reflects the concept of pluralist mediation, where institutions serve as channels through which societal demands are organised and processed (Lindblom, 1977). However, these institutions may also introduce distortions due to administrative constraints, partisan interests, or organisational priorities. At the bottom (narrow apex) lies the core elite, comprising political leaders, economic powerholders, and influential military or strategic actors. Despite their small number, they possess disproportionate control over key decisions, including policy direction, resource allocation, and strategic governance. This concentration of power is consistent with elite theory, which posits that a minority group invariably dominates major societal decisions regardless of formal democratic structures (Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956). The cohesion and strategic coordination among elites enhance their ability to maintain control and influence institutional behaviour.

Overall, the inverted pyramid metaphor captures a paradox: while the masses appear at the “top” in terms of numerical size and symbolic legitimacy, actual decision-making authority is concentrated at the narrow base among elites. Institutions serve as a critical bridge that both facilitates governance and stabilises the system by managing the flow of influence between the masses and elites. This structure highlights the interplay between participation, mediation, and control in political systems, demonstrating that power operates through layered networks rather than a single centralised locus.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this paper indicate that contemporary governance systems operate through a dual structure in which widespread participation coexists with the concentration of substantive decision-making power within elite networks. Across historical and contemporary contexts, empirical evidence suggests that while democratic institutions have expanded access to political participation, this expansion has not necessarily translated into a proportional redistribution of power. Instead, participation often functions as a legitimising mechanism that sustains existing power hierarchies. This pattern is consistent with classical elite perspectives advanced by Pareto (1916, 1935), Mosca (1896, 1939), and Michels (1911, 1962), as well as more recent empirical analyses such as Gilens and Page (2014), which demonstrate that policy outcomes in the United States disproportionately reflect the preferences of economic elites rather than those of average citizens.

In contemporary democratic systems, institutions such as elections, legislatures, and civil society organisations serve as intermediary structures that mediate between the masses and decision-makers. While these institutions are essential for maintaining political stability and legitimacy, they also function as buffers that obscure the concentration of power at the elite level. For instance, in Nigeria, successive electoral cycles since the return to civilian rule in 1999 have institutionalised formal participation, with general elections held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. Despite this regularity, voter turnout has fluctuated and declined in recent years, dropping to approximately 27% in the 2023 elections (Adekoya, 2023). This decline suggests a disjunction between formal participation and substantive political efficacy, reinforcing the notion that citizen engagement does not always translate into meaningful influence over governance outcomes. Furthermore, elite influence in Nigeria is often mediated through informal mechanisms such as patronage networks, political godfatherism, and control over party structures. Studies have shown that political elites frequently determine candidate selection and resource distribution within parties, thereby shaping electoral outcomes before voters even cast their ballots (Olarinmoye, 2008). Similar dynamics can be observed in other African democracies such as Kenya and South Africa, where dominant political parties and economic elites continue to exert significant influence over governance processes despite the presence of competitive elections (Cheeseman, 2015). These empirical cases illustrate that while democratic institutions create an appearance of inclusivity, they often operate within frameworks that preserve elite dominance. At the global level, the concentration of economic power further reinforces elite control over governance systems. According to Oxfam International (2023), the wealthiest 1% of the global population controls nearly half of the world’s wealth, a structural imbalance that enhances their capacity to influence policy through lobbying, campaign

financing, and ownership of key industries. Historical analyses, such as Mills' (1956) paper on the American power structure, similarly demonstrate how political, military, and corporate elites form interconnected networks that coordinate decision-making across institutional domains. In the digital age, this concentration of influence has evolved rather than diminished, as large technology corporations now play a significant role in shaping information flows, public opinion, and regulatory frameworks (Castells, 2009, 2010, 2011).

The discussion of these findings highlights a consistent paradox within modern governance systems: while participatory mechanisms have expanded and institutional inclusivity has increased, real authority remains concentrated within a relatively small and interconnected elite core. Institutions such as elections, legislatures, and media platforms contribute to the perception of openness and accountability, yet they also function as structural buffers that diffuse responsibility and obscure the locus of power. This aligns with Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, where consent is manufactured through cultural and institutional means rather than solely through coercion. In light of this evidence, it becomes apparent that contemporary governance systems sustain legitimacy not only through coercive or administrative control but also through symbolic participation and institutional complexity. Citizens are given opportunities to participate, yet the mechanisms of influence are often mediated through layers of intermediaries that limit direct access to decision-making processes. Consequently, policy outcomes frequently reflect elite preferences, even in systems that outwardly appear democratic and inclusive. This reinforces the central proposition of the Inverted Pyramid Model, which posits that while the visible structure of governance is broad and participatory, the underlying structure of power remains narrow and elite-driven.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the Inverted Pyramid Model offers a more dynamic and context-sensitive framework for understanding contemporary power structures than classical elite theory. While classical theorists such as Pareto (1916, 1935), Mosca (1896, 1939), and Michels (1911, 1962) correctly identified the persistence of minority rule, their assumptions of a visible, cohesive, and hierarchical elite are less adequate in explaining the complexities of modern governance. Drawing on empirical evidence from both historical and contemporary contexts, the paper demonstrates that power in today's political systems is simultaneously diffused in appearance and concentrated in substance. Participatory institutions, elections, civil society, and media have expanded significantly since the late twentieth century, particularly following global democratic transitions in the 1990s. However, as seen in cases such as Nigeria's post-1999 democratic experience and broader global trends of wealth concentration, substantive decision-making authority remains embedded within a relatively small and interconnected elite network (Oxfam International, 2023; Musa, 2023). The Inverted Pyramid Model reconciles this apparent contradiction by illustrating the inversion between perceived power and actual control. It shows that while governance structures appear broad at the surface, real authority is concentrated at the narrow base. In doing so, the model addresses key limitations of classical elite theory and provides a more realistic interpretation of how legitimacy, participation, and control interact in contemporary political systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, the following policy-relevant recommendations are proposed:

1. *Strengthen institutional accountability mechanisms:* There is a need to reinforce accountability frameworks to ensure that decision-making processes are subject to effective oversight and public scrutiny. This includes enhancing the independence and capacity of anti-corruption agencies, judicial institutions, and legislative bodies, as well as ensuring that checks and balances function effectively within the governance system.
2. *Enhance transparency in governance processes:* Promoting transparency is essential to reducing the opacity that often shields elite decision-making. Measures such as open budgeting systems, robust access to information laws, and the adoption of digital governance platforms can improve public access to information and foster greater trust in institutions.
3. *Promote genuine civic engagement beyond symbolic participation:* Efforts should be made to move beyond formal or procedural participation towards meaningful citizen involvement. This can be achieved through political education, inclusive policy consultations, and participatory governance frameworks that enable citizens to exert real influence over public decisions. Without such measures, participatory structures risk remaining performative rather than transformative.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This paper contributes to the advancement of political theory by extending classical elite theory into a neo-elite framework through the Inverted Pyramid Model. By integrating insights from empirical research, political sociology, and contemporary governance practices, the model captures the complex interplay between visible participation and concealed power. It provides a novel analytical tool for scholars to interrogate the dynamics of power in both developed and developing contexts, and for policymakers to better understand the structural constraints that shape governance outcomes. Ultimately, the paper enriches the discourse on power and democracy by offering a more nuanced and adaptable framework for analysing the realities of twenty-first-century political systems.

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