

# The Cause-Effect Dynamics of Income and Political Inequalities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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**Abstract:** Income and political hegemonies by the elites are key features of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999 till date). Political offices have become means to amass wealth and the political landscape has been monetised. These produce a populace that has low income profile and not positioned to compete with the elites in politics. The cause-effect dynamics of income and political inequalities reflect how disparities in income distribution promote political inequality and vice versa. The study adopts a qualitative research and content analysis approaches. Literature has been obtained from journals, books, reports and newspapers. The theoretical underpinning of the study is elite theory. This establishes the role of elites in sustaining the re-enforcement of political inequality by income inequality and vice versa. Findings reveal that the status quo is consolidated through corruption, monetisation of politics and unfriendly atmosphere for participating in decision making. The study stresses the need for wide-ranging reforms aimed at reducing both income and political inequalities to foster a more inclusive and equitable society. Recommendations include unbiased anti-corruption measures, provision of infrastructure and security, good poverty alleviation programmes, demonetisation of politics and involvement of the masses in government's decision making.

**Keywords:** Fourth Republic, income inequality, Nigeria, political inequality

## Introduction

Inequality may take income, economic, wealth, political, and gender forms. New dimensions of inequality are unequal access to technology and data, among others (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, n.d). Income and political inequalities interwoven shape the processes and outcomes of day to day activities in a state. There is no society where everyone is equal in income. The disparity in income varies across states. However, a wide disparity gap may pose threat to meeting basic needs, political prowess of individuals and peace, safety and security. Sub-Sahara Africa is the most unequal region in the world (Odusola, Cornia, Bhorat and Conceição, 2017; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2024). On the average, Sub-Sahara Africa and Latin America rank top in income inequality (UNDP, 2022). This amounts to a situation where those that are at the upper echelon in the income prism also dominate the political space, especially in Nigeria (Faluyi, 2023a). This political advantage gives the political class the economic advantage because of access to state resources and ability to influence state policies to their advantage. This depicts the income hegemony of the political elites.

The importance of income as a form of inequality lies in it being used as a means for a person to achieve what he values and to accomplish what he desires (Sen, 1997). Income with other wealth components like asset, generational accumulation and others (Shaeffer, 2021) are crucial to accomplishing these desires. The fusion of disparities in income, wealth, consumption and other related forms of inequality make economic inequality (Wesley and Peterson, 2017; Yang, 2017). Nevertheless, the economic success of individuals and households is restricted to only a few in a country like Nigeria (Oxfam, 2017). The situation in the country for some years has taken a dimension where people are concerned about how to have sources of income that can at least place them in a position to access the basic necessities (Olutola and Faluyi, 2024). Other things like economic equality, wealth, gender equality, access to technology and data rank secondary in the order of preference. Hence, this study focuses on income inequality because the reality in the country portrays the quest for income to take care of basic necessities.

In Nigeria, income inequality has reached alarming proportions, manifesting in the daily challenges faced by the majority of the populace while a small minority accumulates vast wealth to an excessive degree (Oxfam, 2017). This has created economic elites and most of these elites also fit as political elites. These elites have seen political opportunities as a conduit for economic fortunes. They have formed an oligarch structure that calls the shots economically and politically. They make it difficult for the masses to exercise some political rights like participation as delegates in party primaries, voting, expressing their political affiliations and running for political offices among others. Those that hold the favourable positions in the income scales ensure that most political and economic decisions are in their favour.

This study explores how income inequality fuels political inequality in Nigeria and vice versa. It also seeks to explore how economic and political elites strive to maintain the status quo by the continuous subjugation of the masses into economic and political deprivations.

The study is divided into six sections. The first is conceptual clarification. The concepts of inequality, income inequality and political inequality were clarified. The second section focuses on the theoretical underpinning of the study- elite theory. An explanation of income inequality in Nigeria is the content of the third section. The fourth section centers on the intersection between political and income inequalities. The fifth section is fixated on sustaining the status quo of income and political inequalities in Nigeria. This section is divided into three main sub sections. These are corruption, monetised politics and unfriendly atmosphere for participating in decision making. The last section concludes the study and gives recommendations.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Income Inequality**

Inequality may be a state of countries being unequal or individuals and groups among or within a country being unequal (Vitkovics, 2023). Inequality is a reflection of obstinate disadvantage for particular segments of the society which may be an aftermath of deficiency of mobility and opportunity (Dabla-Norris, Kochhar, Suphaphiphat, Ricka and Tsounta, 2015). There is need to reduce the disadvantaged groups that are in the inequality ditch. Sustainable Development Goal 10 is reduce inequalities within and among countries (World Bank, 2019). This goal has targets that synchronise with the scope of this study. The existence of these targets indicate that income is unequally distributed globally and within countries. The correction of the imbalance in income inequality goes a long way in addressing economic inequality. Income inequality is an underpinning factor that exacerbates health, education, work, political participation and security inequalities (Oduola, Cornia, Borat and Conceição, 2017). This explains why Target 10.1 seeks to achieve and sustain income growth while Target 10.2 seeks to promote social, economic and political inclusion (World Bank, 2019). Thus, there is a link between income and political inequalities. Hence, an understanding of both concepts is crucial.

Income inequality 'shows the distribution of income earned in an economy across the population, usually calculated at the household level, weighted by the number and age of household members' Vitkovics, 2023: 138). It shows the extent of imbalance in the distribution of income. Income inequality can also be measured at individual level (UNDP, 2022). One of the most internationally accepted and common way of measuring income inequality is the Gini coefficient. Gini coefficient is the 'measure of the deviation of the distribution of income among individuals or households in a country from a perfectly equal distribution'. (UNDP, 2024: 287). It is on the scale of 0 to 1 with higher value representing a more income unequal country (Vitkovics, 2023).

Income inequality has its foundations in gender, social, economic, race, geographical and occupational differences (Gimba, Seraj and Ozdeser, 2021). The authors aver that globally, there is gender variation because more men are employed than women and the former are paid higher, consequently widening the income gap. They also posit that men and women have unequal access to opportunities such as education, health services and finance and these have links with high-income inequality. On geographical disparities, they submit that differences in geographical locations is also a determinant of inequality in income. They conclude that differences in access to economic and environmental resources among cities and villages, plains and mountainous regions, coastal regions and landlocked areas have impact on the extent of income inequality (Gimba, Seraj and Ozdeser, 2021). In congruence with the authors' views, a geographical area that depends mainly on agriculture but faces shortage of water and poor irrigation system and being managed by a government that is insensitive to their plight may not be able to have optimal yield which may affect their income and plunge them into poverty. The combination of income inequality and inadequate, unequal, and ineffective delivery of public services leads to exceedingly high rates of multidimensional poverty (Oxfam, 2017).

Hence, income inequality may be caused by poor infrastructure and the high income inequality with poor infrastructure snowballs into poverty.

### **Political Inequality**

Theoretically and on paper, the 1999 constitution of Nigeria provides and guarantees political freedom for her citizenry.

Section 7 sub-section 4 of the 1999 constitution provides that:

*The Government of a State shall ensure that every person who is entitled to vote or be voted for at an election to House of Assembly shall have the right to vote or be voted for at an election to a local government council.*

The above constitutional provision is to ensure the participation of every citizen in political activities which includes right to vote and right to contest for public office at the Chairmanship and Councillorship elections at every Local Government in Nigeria. Citizens also have the right to participate in politics at the federal level and state executive level.

Notwithstanding the above provisions, all citizens cannot be equally active politically but it is crucial for them to be given opportunities to engage in politics (Lindgren and Oskarsson, 2023). This implies that the elites may dominate the political scene but the masses should have stake in politics. Political equality consists of factors such as participation, representation, and the level of influence on policies by individuals with lower or moderate incomes, among others (Houle, 2018). In most states, any manifestation that portrays opposite of these features represent political inequality. Political inequality refers to the unequal distribution of political resources and privileges, including 'the law, symbols, policy or other output that is the result of the political process' (Dubrow, 2014: 12). There is no perfect political equality in any state but through social contract few people are saddled with leading a state and through laws and policies, ensure orderliness and service delivery. Social contract encompasses the masses arrogating power to the ruling class for the latter to allocate resources. These few by virtue of the positions they occupy have political and decision making powers. However, the masses are reserved with the power to vote to change their leaders, contribute to decision making, protest and exercise other rights.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Elite theory**

This study adopts elite theory as its theoretical lens because the actions or inactions of elites determine if income and political inequalities reduce, remain or increase. Income and politically advantaged citizens are an integral part of Nigerian elites. This privilege arrogated to Nigerian elites explains why elite theory was used as the theoretical lens for this study.

Elites may originate from the state and the business world, but also from guerrilla, unions, the mass media, nongovernmental organisations, any type of social association and so on (Lopez, 2013). Elite theory conveys a situation where there exists a minority who rule the society, these minorities most times obtain political power due to their wealth, they replace themselves and an elite may belong to more than one elite group (Higley, 2010; Lopez, 2013). Most times, political elites double as economic elites. If these economic elites do not run for political offices, they sometimes operate behind the scenes. Hence, an economic elite may also be a political and other forms of elite. Thus, we have political, economic, religious, academic, organisational elites and other groups of elites depending of what segment of the society is being considered. Political elites are at the pinnacle among these elites because they superintend the making of policies which not only affect the masses but other elite groups. However, elites who do not assume the portfolio of political elites also have influence on policies. This is captured by Fergusson, Robinson and Torres (2023) that elites can influence politicians not to adopt a policy and if such policies are adopted, they may influence the political class not to implement it. These elites can also influence policies to be implemented.

Elites like to sustain their dominance and replace themselves with trusted allies. This explains why political and economic elites strive to maintain the political and income inequalities in Nigeria. Any move to change the status quo and promote egalitarianism is often resisted through policies or the use of force. The fluidity of being an economic elite and possibly a political elite is why income and political inequalities operate as self-reinforcing issues in Nigeria.

#### **Income inequality in Nigeria**

Typically, those situated at the lower end of the income spectrum are both relatively and absolutely poor. However, it is conceivable for a society to eradicate absolute poverty while still grappling with prevalent relative poverty

(inequality) (Wesley and Peterson, 2017). This implies that some members of the society may have income hegemony, those at the lower level may not be able to afford some ostentatious privileges but should not find it difficult to afford the basic necessities of life.

Income inequality in Nigeria is related to the poverty level in the country. The percentage of the population below the monetary national poverty line in 2018 was 40.1 per cent while those living below the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of \$1.90 per day was 39.1 per cent (UNDP, 2022). The situation was a bit fear in 2021. The population below the monetary national poverty line was 40.1 per cent of the population while those living below the PPP of \$2.15 per day was 30.9 per cent (UNDP, 2024). The country has not fared better in national multidimensional poverty. The headcount of those that are multidimensionally poor is 62.9 per cent while the intensity of poverty is 40.9 per cent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This multidimensional poverty is a conglomeration of lapses in education, living standard and employment. Those above the poverty lines are not insulated from political inequality and relatively poor compared to the super rich in the country. The Gini coefficient describes income inequality in the country. The Gini coefficient has been between 0.35 and 0.43 from 2005 to 2022 (UNDP 2015; UNDP, 2018; UNDP, 2024). UNDP (2024) reported that the income shares held by the richest 1 per cent is 11.6 per cent, those held by the richest 10 per cent is 26.7 per cent while those held by the poorest 40 per cent is 18.7 per cent. Although the Gini coefficient is relatively low compared to countries with similar economic status, reality portrays a society that is widely divided along income line. One of the contributing factors to this fact is corruption that has given the political class access to state wealth which gives them income advantage. Although, there are rich individuals and families who genuinely amassed their wealth. The second is the dominance of the economy by the informal sector which culminates in a population that the majority earns low income due to unfavourable operating environment of these business entities (Omoniyi, 2018; Olutola and Faluyi, 2024). The income gap is so wide that the annual income generated by the wealthiest individual in Nigeria is adequate to elevate two million people out of poverty for a year (Oxfam, 2017). As at 2016 bringing all Nigerians living below the extreme poverty line of \$1.90 per day out of poverty for a year would cost approximately \$24 billion (Oxfam, 2017). This sum is marginally less than the collective wealth of the five richest Nigerians in 2016, which amounted to \$29.9 billion (Oxfam, 2017).

### **Political and Income Inequalities: The intersection explained**

The intersection between income and political inequality in Nigeria is historical. Nigerians were better economically from independence until the drop in oil prices and economic decline of the early 1980s (Obadan, 2001; Olutola and Faluyi, 2024). However, the long years of military rule and the corrupt and ethnic centric practices of politicians bred the practice of acquiring power at all cost and remaining in the corridor of power by the military and political elites. The military created a system where people found it difficult to challenge their corrupt practices and politically participate (Aluko, 2020; Faluyi 2023a). The political elites were not better neither as they encouraged politics of exclusion, bitterness, subjugation and the tradition of holding on to power (Faluyi, 2023a). Such aura of unhealthy politicking has not ceased in the Fourth Republic but it has been sustained through income inequality, ethnicity and politics of violence. However, this study focuses on income inequality.

Income inequality diminishes political equality among income strata because the extent to which individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds possess political influence differs (Houle, 2018). Economic elites are fortified with income that far outweighs those of the masses. This fuels income inequality. Those that have the income advantage are placed on a better pedestal on political matters (Zakari and Button, 2022). Economic elites dominate the political scene as individuals, in campaign spending, in lobbying, and in elected offices (Andrias and Sachs, 2021). The masses are economically unequal with the political and economic elites and this makes them politically deprived in terms of participating in governance. The political elites who are politically privileged than the masses most times double as economic elites and can easily influence economic policies that favour them irrespective of the effects of such policies on the masses. Thus, those that are economically less privileged or of the middle class are politically unequal with the political elites and those that are politically less privileged make little or no influence in determining economic decisions and do not control state resources.

In reality and in the case of Nigeria, there cannot be perfectly equal proportion in terms of income and political inclusion. However, the gulf created in the equality spheres of these two phenomena in Nigeria are epitomes of self-reinforcing problems. The economy is dominated by the informal sector and the weakness of the formal sector have reduced the fiscal prowess of the masses. This is because societal and political issues like poor infrastructure, corruption and insecurity among other harsh business surviving environments have stunted the growth of the private sector. This sector would have cushioned the effects of the income imbalance. Making a change by hastening the slow economic wheel through political participation has also become difficult. Rather, the political class make economic

policies that do not favour the masses but favour the former. The drivers of inequality, income inequality inclusive in Nigeria are well captured by Dawodu and Egharevba (2021). These are retrogressive taxation, poor budgeting system and allocation, poor resource management and poor policy implementation, elite capture, cronyism and favouritism as well as prohibitive cost of governance (Dawodu and Egharevba, 2021). The implication of income inequality is that it vests the power to make political decisions among a select oligarchs who have self-aggrandising interests, and these could lead to the inefficient utilisation of human resources and political instability. Inequality surges the influence of the affluent but reduces the income of the less privileged (Dawodu and Egharevba, 2021). It has become of game of if you do not beat them, you join them. People that are not in the political class identify godfathers that bring them on board or they become foot soldiers of political gladiators by assisting these political giants to perpetuate themselves in power through unconventional means like vote buying, ballot box snatching, unethical campaign activities, and attack of political opponents among others. Through these, they become members of the political class or their appendages with the ultimate aim of assessing state resources to fill their income inequality vacuums.

### **Maintaining the status quo of income and political inequalities in Nigeria**

#### **Corruption**

Corruption in the public sector is high. There has been conflicting reports on the exact amount of public funds that have been looted by public officials since independence in 1960 but this has been in hundreds of billions, if not trillions of United States Dollars (Ajayi and Ifegbayi, 2015; Oxfam, 2017; Ojo, 2019; Ndujihe, 2024). Corrupt practices further impoverish the poor and make the rich richer. The funds that would have been used to provide infrastructure and boost security are diverted for private use (Aluko, 2020; Zakari and Buton, 2022). This creates setbacks for the citizens in living a good life. They experience deficits in healthcare, good roads, portable water, sanitation and so on. The weak state of infrastructure and poor security of human lives make it difficult for small businesses and big corporations to effectively operate. Consequently, the populace become the ‘provider’ of infrastructure rather than the government and the capacities of these businesses and firms to maximize their gains drop which affects their capacity to engage the services of more people (Olutola, 2014). Hence, income inequality is sustained.

Politicians through corruption amass wealth to run for political offices or sponsor their protégées. This gives the political class economic and political advantages. They have raised the bar to run for political offices as obvious in the financial components attached to politicking in Nigeria. Therefore, those not in the political class or wealthy individuals but are interested in running for political offices are shut out of political race because the exercise has been monetised. Monetisation of politics is inseparable from corruption.

The government has introduced measures to address the issue of corruption. For instance, the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission. However, there are corrupt politicians who have been convicted but granted state pardon, one has his conviction overturned through questionable court decision and some have their trials going poorly and have not been convicted (Olutola, 2014; Yahaya, 2020; Ige, 2022; Sanni, 2022; Ndujihe, 2024). Actions like these make politicians less concerned about punitive actions that may snowball from their corrupt acts.

#### **Monetised Politics**

Political participation is left to the prerogative of those that are veterans in the game of monetising politics. Monetised politics within this context is divided into high cost of party primaries expression of interest and nomination forms, vote buying and selling and electoral irregularities, and high cost of governance and saturated political offices.

#### ***High Cost of Party Primaries Expression of Interest and Nomination forms***

Contesting for political offices is one of the fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens but the cost of expression of interest and nomination forms have shielded poor Nigerians from contesting for elections (Mohammed and Danbaba, 2023). The major political parties in Nigeria sell their nomination forms at very high prices. This system automatically shuts out aspirants that may have good intentions but do not have the financial capacity to campaign on the platform of these political parties. Of recent, expression of interest and nomination forms of political parties have been on the high side (Mohammed and Danbaba, 2023; Vanguard, 5 September 2018). **Table 1** shows a breakdown of the cost of these forms in the 2015 to 2023 elections for All Progressives Congress (APC), People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP).

**Table 1: Expression of Interest and Nomination Forms of APC, PDP and LP from 2015-2023**

Year	office	APC	PDP	LP
2015	President	N27.5 million	N22 million	-
	Governorship	N5.5 million/N10.5 million	N11 million	-
	Senate	N3.3 million/N5.3 million	N4.5 million	-
	House of Representatives	N3.3 million/N5.3 million	N2.5 million	-
	State House of Assembly	N550,000/N800,000	N1.2 million	-
2019	President	N45 million	N12 million	-
	Governorship	N22.5 million	N6 million	-
	Senate	N7 million	N3.5 million	-
	House of Representatives	N3.85 million	N1.5 million	-
	State House of Assembly	N850,000	N 600,000	-
2023	President	N100 million	N40 million	N35 million
	Governorship	N50 million	N21 million	N16 million
	Senate	N20 million	N3.5 million	N 3 million
	House of Representatives	N10 million	N2.5 million	N1.7 million
	State House of Assembly	N2 million	N600,000	N 500, 000

Sources: Odunsi, 2014; Vanguard, 5 September 2018; BBC News Pidgin, 2022; Angbulu, 2022; Mohammed and Danbaba, 2023;

In 2023, other major political parties like the New Nigeria People's Party, Young Progressives Party and Social Democratic Party sold their expression of Interest and Nomination Forms but not as expensive as those of **Table 1** while the African Action Congress made its forms free (BBC News Pidgin, 2022). In the APC and PDP, aspirants that are youths were granted 50 per cent discount while women and people with disabilities got a waiver for nomination forms (BBC News Pidgin, 2022; Mohammed and Danbaba, 2023). The argument is that it is not compulsory to make it free but the cost should be affordable for Nigerians considering the level of poverty in the country.

This system of high cost of forms breeds godfatherism and corruption because those unable to purchase the forms may have their forms purchased on their behalf by 'established' politicians and upon emerging victorious, the former will be under pressure to 'pay back' their 'sponsors'.

This high cost has implications which are shutting the poor out of running for political offices; promotion of violence and rigging, win at all cost syndrome, encourages corruption and less interest in good governance (Mohammed and Danbaba, 2023).

### ***Vote Buying and Selling and Electoral Irregularities***

Vote buying means getting political support through exchange of private materials or direct benefits (Magaji and Musa, 2022). It may take the form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by politicians to influence the outcome of an election (Magaji and Musa, 2022). Vote buying signifies financial and material inducements to covet the votes of prospective voters and it takes place during voter registration, nomination and primary election, during campaigns and on general election days (Magaji and Musa, 2022; Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbonam, and Nnamani, 2022). Vote buying starts from buying votes by aspirants from delegates during party primaries. The delegates and voters are the ones that possess the votes to be sold while the politicians buy the votes. In Nigeria's elections, electoral officials, security agents, the media, other stakeholders and voters are bribed to have the outcome of elections in politicians' favour (Nwagwu et al., 2022). The delegates, voters, electoral officials and other stakeholders are susceptible to selling their votes or compromising mainly because of poverty (Nwagwu et al., 2022; Faluyi, 2023a). Thus, because of income inequality, they become conduits for promoting political inequality.

Upon nomination as an aspirant, the delegates who are party members are to vote to elect a party's candidate among the aspirants. The use of delegates is the most common method of electing party candidates (Sambo, Sule, Adamu and Spetiadi, 2024). However, this process has been monetised, especially in the APC and PDP such that the aspirant that can offer the highest bribe to the delegates wins the election (Osori, 2023; Sambo et al., 2024). This represents an intra-elite battle where one elite bends for the other due to financial prowess of the one that has a higher offer for votes. The implication is that those that may have good governance to offer the country may be denied candidacy slots.

During campaign season, politicians are in the habit of distributing cash, foodstuff, and other material things to the public. These are done not because they care about the welfare of the masses but to covet votes from prospective electorates. It comes with implications. Financing of political campaigns by the elites frequently leads to scenarios where policymaking procedures and institutional operations are manipulated, favouring a minority comprising the economic and political elites (Oxfam, 2017). This means that the financiers will do everything within their reach to ensure that such policies are parochial. This reinforces the capacity of this privileged group to utilize government structures across all levels to garner economic advantages (Oxfam, 2017). Consequently, this widens the gap in income distribution.

This monetised attitude continues until election days. The electorates are the ones who cast their votes in ballot boxes but politicians do not only induce voters but also induce other stakeholders to influence the voting patterns and have results declared in the favour of the politicians' political parties. Voting is a form of political participation and if done in a free and fair atmosphere, it has marginal contribution to political equality. However, a system characterised with wide gap of income and wealth between the rich and the poor have created a fertile ground for merchants who offer voters money and material things for their votes. Inequality not just increases available resources for patronage, but also makes the poor more prone to influence. All things being equal, the cost of buying someone's support or vote should decrease as their financial situation worsens (Houle, 2018). Thus, people may have their preferred candidates but they sacrifice voting for those they feel can give them better 'temporary' living conditions for financial and incentives in kind. The income inequality in the country also make the electorates guilty of vote selling. They consider the antecedents of the candidates or the political parties and see no best candidate. Therefore, they feel that if they do not get the incentives to vote for the highest bidder, their preferred candidates or the ones offering the incentives would not perform well if elected (Faluyi, 2022). Consequently, they rather take the incentives and enjoy such for a short time rather than losing on both ends- the incentives and good governance for the next four years.

Aside buying and selling votes, violence is sometimes applied so that politicians secure victory. They use this to complement vote buying considering the fact that opposition members might have bought votes as well. Hence, such violence acts are used to outpace opposition. Members of the political class take advantage of the income and political inequality in the country by involving in crime and carrying this out through recruiting the income and politically disadvantaged. Actions like ballot box snatching, intimidation of voters and attack on opponents are criminal acts (Magaji and Musa, 2022). They recruit foot soldiers who are financially weak and use them to implement these criminal acts. You hardly see a politician personally involving in these vices. They engage non-state actors who are not as economically buoyant as them to perpetrate these acts.

Aside the issue of poverty, poor implementation of provisions against vote buying and selling and other electoral vices is a contributing factor. The Electoral Act, 2022 has provisions on vote buying, bribery and conspiracy, undue influence, placing prominence on secrecy in voting and disorderly conduct at elections, among others and the

consequences of infringement (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2022). However, cases of successful prosecution are rare.

These vote buying and selling and electoral violence practices encourage corruption and jettison good governance because of the need to recoup the expenses incurred by the politicians or their sponsors. It also leads to making policies and taking actions that will favour the political and economic elites and weaken state institutions.

### ***Cost of Governance and Saturation of Public Offices***

Aside the cost-gulping actions of pre-office occupation activities, the remuneration and paraphernalia of office of political office holders are cost consuming. The offices are so attractive such that candidates would give it whatever it takes to attain their desired positions. Those that occupy or seek to occupy political positions place wealth accumulation above service (Aluko, 2020; Faluyi, 2023a). The multiplicity of political offices (Oxfam, 2017; Faluyi, 2023b) complicates the matter. Thus, numerous political offices have been created and the occupiers of these offices through corrupt practices deplete the resources of the country. In essence, the cost of governance is excessively high. According to Oxfam (2017), the expenses associated with running the governmental apparatus are inflated due to excessive staffing, inflated remuneration and perks, arbitrary expansion of government bodies and committees, undisclosed allowances, and generous retirement packages. This bloated cost of governance exacerbates inequality by leaving minimal resources to cater for essential services for the expanding Nigerian population (Oxfam, 2017). There are ministries and government departments at the federal, state and local levels. Some parastatals and institutions duplicate others in their functions mainly because their existence hangs on political patronage (Faluyi, 2023b). These government bodies have career staff and the political/appointed cadre while elective positions are reserved for executive and legislative seats in the three levels of government. These institutions require operation costs and remuneration for career and politically appointed staff. The elected officials have bogus remuneration and some get retirement packages after serving for four or eight years (Oxfam, 2017; Okuwobi, 2021; Ogunyale, 2023; Ijasheun, 2023). Some governors and their deputies that serve for four or eight years have retirement packages including pension and other benefits. The president, vice president, governors and national assembly members have a lot of appointees. Remunerating these aids and their principals not only take a chunk of national budget but appointing the former is a means of patronage to compensate them for their political support. This is a subtle way of enlisting some of them into the political class. These recurring expenses incurred on political office holders and their aids would have been used to provide infrastructure and better standard of living for Nigerians.

Career public servants on the payroll of government are not well remunerated (very low minimum wage considering the high inflation rate in contemporary Nigeria) and they are owed pensions and the situation is exacerbated as governments, especially some at the state level owed salaries and allowances for months (Ijasheun, 2023). Such actions are tantamount widening the income gap. This also implies that except supported by members of the political class, a public servant (after resigning or retiring) will not be able to run for political offices. They are also susceptible to vote buying.

### ***Unfriendly atmosphere for participating in decision making***

To reduce elite domination and to consolidate democracy, the masses are to participate in decision making. However, this has been met with opposition by the political class because they see active involvement of the masses as an avenue to change the status quo. The masses can influence decision making through engagements and interactive sessions with politicians, the media and social media, pressure groups and labour unions and peaceful protests among others (Faluyi, 2023b). Democracy is designed to promote people oriented policies and programmes (Sambo, Sule, Adamu and Spetiadi, 2024). As a result of political and economic power overlap, vested interests are given preference in the allocation of opportunities, income, and wealth, and policy-making is skewed in favor of the wealthy (Oxfam, 2017). Political and income inequalities breed an atmosphere of non-inclusive governance. Non inclusive within the context of making decisions that affect the masses. The masses are excluded and these decisions are foisted on them. Rather, decisions that perpetuate the elites in power and give them income hegemony are made. Elite capture and cronyism obstruct efforts to alleviate poverty and exacerbate inequality by subverting well-meaning policies designed to foster inclusive economic growth (Oxfam, 2017).

Economic growth receives a boost through the provision of good infrastructure. Infrastructure provision is a progeny of decision making. The infrastructure provided are sometimes reflections of the will of the elites to sustain political patronage, clientelism and maintenance of the inequality status quo (Faluyi, 2023b). The cycle of effect of income and political inequality in relation to decision making is captured by Houle (2018) in three phases. Initially, inequality results in the wealthy having more resources compared to others, allowing them to have greater sway over the



government and its decisions. Furthermore, it widens the disparity in policy preferences between the wealthy and the less affluent, thereby boosting the motivations of the former to utilise their assets to manage the government, such as by implementing suppression. Thirdly, inequity causes a decrease in political involvement from lower-income individuals compared to wealthier individuals, resulting in a weakened political influence among the less affluent (Houle, 2018). The masses oppose some of these unfavourable decisions through the press, social media, protests and other means.

These strategies deployed by the masses cannot balance the income and political inequalities but they are meant give some succor to them in terms of justice and better standard of living. However, the response of the political elites have sometimes taken the shape of abuse of rights. Journalists have been arrested or sanctioned on account of what has been published on their platforms (Kumolu, 2024). Some of these publications include exposing some corrupt practices, bad governance and insecurity (Ewang, 2024). Some Nigerians who engage in social media discussions or postings are equally arrested citing the violation of the Section 24 of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc) Act, 2015 as the reason for their arrest (Amnesty International, 2023; Kumolu, 2024). This provision of Section 24 of the Act is criminalising anyone who knowingly or intentionally sends messages other matter that are grossly offensive, false, and threats through computer systems (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015). This Acts has been given different interpretations by law enforcement agents and these influence the way it is enforced. Some Nigerians have been arrested for posts on politicians, corporate organisations, government policies and so on (Yekeen, 2018; Amnesty International, 2023). These arrests are becoming so common that one doubts if the provisions of the Act has actually been infringed to warrant such arrests. The focus of this study is not on the rightness or otherwise of the Act. The double standard played by the elites in implementing the Act and arrests effected at the slightest activities on social media raise concerns. Those in the political class and their allies have posted implicating posts and made statements that could threaten the peace of the country but they have not been arrested or prosecuted (Tolu-Kolawole, 2021; Maishanu, 2024). Although, it may be argued that some of these officials have immunity but after leaving office, they remain untouched. Peaceful protests have been one of the tools to express the masses' displeasure. They are conduits to pass messages to government on what the masses need. However, the response to protests which is sometimes force results into arrests and sometimes injury and death (Iwuoha and Aniche, 2021; Amnesty international, 2023) are signs that the elites a keen on maintaining the income and political imbalance in the system. The attitude of the government towards protests widens the gap between the government and the masses because people for the fear of their freedom and lives would rather prefer not to participate in peaceful protests which have the propensity to influence decisions that affect the masses.

The political class see any means to challenge the status quo through the media, social media and protests as threats. Thus, they prefer to decimate the expression of these through laws, force and propaganda.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study focused on the vicious cycle of income and political inequalities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Inequality, income inequality, and political inequalities were conceptualised. The nature of income inequality in Nigeria was emphasised. The theoretical groundwork of the study is elite theory. Elites have political and income hegemonies in Nigeria and they deploy all avenues to maintain the status quo. The intersection between income and political inequalities in Nigeria served as the foundation to come with the findings of the study. The findings are encapsulated in the notion that through corruption, monetised politics and unfriendly atmosphere for participating in decision making, income inequality strengthens political inequality in Nigeria and vice versa.

Recommendations include stemming the tide of corruption. Non-selective anti-corruption measures should be implemented with sincerity. Irrespective of the personality of the accused, justice should be discharged without fear or favour. Good and the required infrastructure for each community should be provided. Security of lives and property should be taken serious by government at all levels. Masses oriented poverty alleviation programmes should be encouraged. Party primaries expression of interest and nomination forms should be made cheap so that more people can run for political offices. The provisions of the Electoral Act 2022 against vote buying and selling and other forms of electoral irregularities should be well implemented. Political offices should be restricted to key portfolios that will benefit the country. They should not be allocated on patronage basis. Political offices should be made less attractive by reducing the remuneration and giving priority to service. Policies, programmes and projects affect the masses and they should have their views respected in rolling out these. The government should be more tolerant to citizens' participation in decision making as such decisions will go long ways in addressing some specific needs of the masses. However, this does not mean people should circulate information that are not true or defame others.

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