

THE CLASS SOCIETY: A DANGEROUS TREND IN TODAY'S NIGERIA**Sanusi Sama'ila Moyi**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57233/zjpd.v6i2.20>**Abstract**

This article examines the emergence of a deeply stratified "class society" in Nigeria, where the systematic withdrawal of the elite from public institutions- education, healthcare, and infrastructure has dismantled the concept of a shared national community. Through a qualitative desk-based review of scholarly literature, international organization reports, and contemporary media accounts; the study analyzes the manifestations and consequences of this institutionalized segregation. The findings reveal a dangerous multi-sectoral divide. In education, Nigeria allocates only 7.3 percent of its budget (far below UNESCO's 15-20 percent benchmark), creating an "educational apartheid" where privilege determines opportunity. In healthcare, over 20,966 health workers have left the country within one year, and Nigerians spend \$1-2 billion annually on medical tourism while public facilities remain in disrepair. The elite's symbolic retreat, exemplified by politicians travelling abroad for children's graduation ceremonies, reinforces spatial segregation and signals that success is tied to escaping Nigeria. The cumulative consequences include eroded social cohesion, declining trust in governance, and normalization of a two-tier citizenship where over 85 percent of Nigerians function within a broken public system. Recommendations include radical budgetary reallocation, legislation banning official foreign medical trips, mandatory public service contributions from private institutions, and revitalization of common-ground infrastructure. The study concludes that Nigeria's stability depends on closing the widening gap between rich and poor through deliberate policy interventions ensuring quality services are accessible to all citizens regardless of income.

Keywords: Class society, social stratification, educational apartheid, healthcare segregation, inequality

1. Introduction

Contemporary Nigeria presents a profound socio-economic paradox: a nation endowed with immense human capital and vast natural resources, yet increasingly fractured by a rigid and deepening wealth gap. Within living memory, the children of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat routinely shared the same classroom benches in well-regarded public schools, while citizens across the economic spectrum accessed identical public hospitals and road networks (Gimba, 2025). Today, however, this shared

national reality has been supplanted by an institutionalized segregation that splits the population into two distinct spheres of existence. The first is a domain of extreme privilege, insulated comfort, and global mobility reserved for the elite; the second is a parallel reality of material deprivation, systemic indignity, and a grueling struggle for daily survival forced upon the masses as reported Ekpa (2026 Jun 23) in the Guardian Editorial.

Rather than a simple economic gradient, this widening divide represents a structural reorganization of Nigerian society. The physical and institutional detachment of

the upper class from civic life fundamentally alters the state-citizen contract. When the segment of society holding the greatest political and financial leverage no longer relies on public infrastructure, the mechanisms for institutional accountability break down, leaving state services to decay in a vicious cycle of chronic underfunding. This social division is highly visible across three of Nigeria's primary social structures: educational systems, healthcare facilities, and marketplaces, which distinctly separate the two social classes. The research aims to analyze how this institutional deterioration poses a severe threat to the social unity and coexistence of the Nigerian population; to reverse this social fragmentation the research suggests a deliberate, legislated revitalization of public infrastructure, forcing a policy shift that ties elite accountability back to the standard of public healthcare and education.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this article is the emergence of a deeply stratified "class society" in Nigeria, where the withdrawal of the elite into private enclaves (private schools, foreign hospitals, and exclusive consumer spaces) has effectively dismantled the concept of a shared national community. According to the Guardian (Agbajilke, 2025 Jan 23), over 85 percent of Nigerians now function within a broken and unreliable public system, while the wealthy minority inhabits a parallel universe of luxury and international mobility. Oxfam data reveals that the top 10 percent of Nigerians control approximately 90 percent of the country's resources, leaving over 83 million people to survive on less than ₦3,100 (\$2) a day (David, 2025 August 7; Makina, 2025). This dangerous dichotomy is no longer merely an economic inequality but a structural reorganization of society that threatens social cohesion, undermines democratic governance, and cripples national

development. The recent trend of Nigerian billionaires travelling with large entourages to the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) for their children's graduation ceremonies and healthcare facilities exemplifies this elite retreat and signals the normalization of a two-tier citizenship (BBC, 2025).

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the manifestations of the class divide across critical sectors, specifically education, healthcare, and public infrastructure.
2. Analyze the socio-political and economic effects of this institutionalized segregation on national cohesion and the average Nigerian citizen.
3. Critically assess current government policies regarding public goods.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Class Society refers to a social order in which individuals are grouped into hierarchical social categories based on their access to wealth, power, and prestige (Marx, 1867). Class must be understood along the processes of material production, strictly moving towards self-sustenance and production. Therefore, the division between classes has widened, and the condition of the society has deteriorated so badly that almost all economic, social, and political structures in Nigeria have collapsed (Tella & Yahaya, 2010). In the Nigerian context, this has evolved from a simple income disparity into a "two-sphere" society, where the "Haves" (the elite) and the "Have-nots" (the masses) no longer share the same platforms for education, health, or justice.

2.1.2 Social Stratification in this context is perpetuated not just by income but by institutional withdrawal; the elite

physically and structurally remove themselves from public institutions, leaving the masses to bear the brunt of systemic decay (Iordye & Jato, 2026).

2.1.3 Public Goods Withdrawal is a critical concept here, describing the process whereby the wealthy abandon state-provided services, thereby reducing political pressure to maintain or improve them, leading to a vicious cycle of underfunding and collapse (Obiakor, 2024).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This analysis is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives:

a. **Marxian Class Conflict Theory:** Adapted from Karl Marx (1867), this theory posits that society is divided into classes (bourgeoisie vs. proletariat) with conflicting interests. In contemporary Nigeria, the "Haves" maintain their dominance by controlling the means of quality production (elite schools, private hospitals) and withdrawing from state institutions. Iordye and Jato (2026) argue that this withdrawal is a mechanism to ensure their offspring retain a competitive advantage, solidifying class boundaries and preventing upward mobility for the poor. The study by Iordye and Jato (2026) further demonstrates that private schools in Nigeria grew by 39 percent between 2017 and 2022 while public provision stagnated, deepening the commodification of education and entrenching class-mediated marginalization.

b. **Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction and Distinction:** Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that the elite use cultural and social capital to distinguish themselves from the masses. The proliferation of private schools with international curricula, foreign medical trips, and conspicuous graduation celebrations in Western capitals are forms of "distinction." Ayling (2024) demonstrates that elite Nigerian parents

consume high-quality international education not merely for academic outcomes but as a form of social distinction, constructing British pedagogy and methodology as superior to Nigerian pedagogy and positioning their children for elite status reproduction. As Lamont and Molnar (2002) note, "symbolic classification is key to the reproduction of class privileges" precisely because elite status and privilege can only exist in relationship to non-elite status. The democratization of education in Nigeria is perceived by elite parents to have blurred class boundaries and devalued the high status once attached to education in colonial and early post-colonial eras, prompting them to turn to the international education market for social reproduction (Ayling, 2019; Bourdieu, 1984).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing a desk-based review and secondary data analysis. Data were gathered from existing scholarly literature, official reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and Oxfam, national statistics from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and contemporary media accounts documenting elite behaviour (e.g., billionaires and government officials' children's graduation trips, healthcare outflows). A thematic content analysis was applied to extract patterns of segregation across the education, healthcare, and consumer sectors. This methodological approach allows for a critical interrogation of macro-social trends without relying on primary field data, focusing instead on facts and observable societal shifts over the past two decades.

4. Discussion of Findings

The data analysis reveals a systemic, multi-sectoral division that underscores the dangerous trend in question.

4.1 The Educational Apartheid

The findings indicate a total division of the educational system. Public schools, once considered a great equalizer, are now "shambolic" and grossly underfunded. Nigeria's national budget allocation for education in 2025 was N3.52 trillion. This represented roughly 7.3 percent of its national budget for education (Agbajileke, 2025; Ogwo, 2026), far below the UNESCO-recommended benchmark of 15 to 20 percent of public expenditure or 4 to 6 percent of GDP (UNESCO, 2022; Business Day, 2026). The 2025 education budget of N3.52 trillion, while historically high, falls significantly short of the N7.45 trillion to N9.94 trillion that is required to meet UNESCO standards (Agbajileke, 2025).

Meanwhile, the proliferation of private schools has created an "educational apartheid." Iordye and Jato (2026) documented that private schools grew by 39 percent between 2017 and 2022, while public provision stagnated. Obiakor (2024) demonstrates that private school attendance is strongly associated with socio-economic factors like wealth, parents' education, and place of residence, and that low-cost private schools fail to reach the poorest children, particularly in rural and northern areas, exacerbating inequality in educational access.

An education expert, Ijiwola was quoted to have said "The resource disparity is staggering; parents may spend up to ₦33.6 million per child on private education, compared to as little as ₦1.4 million for public schooling" (Salami, 2025 Jan 6). This is not just a statistical gap but a functional one. Ijiwola warned, "There is a significant gap between the haves and have-nots. Since everyone will eventually

meet in the labour market, graduates from private schools are more likely to secure employment" (Salami, 2025 Jan 5). Education, once the ladder of social mobility, has become a gatekeeper of privilege (Gimba, 2025).

My Abuja neighbour was telling me that he is paying over N1.5m per term for two of his children; one in Nursery is paying over N7, 00,000 while the one in primary level is paying close to a million. He said he paid almost N5m per session for his two kids (discussion with Jamilu 45, 18th July 2026). This is in Abuja; even my children who are studying in the north, I pay 700,000 per term for my three kids. The problem is that, once you have the means, you have no alternative but to enroll your children in a private school, depending on one's income and capability. This is because the educational system, especially primary and secondary schools, has collapsed, particularly in the northern part of the country. The politicians are busy renovating classrooms without qualified teachers. Which qualified teacher will stay and teach with the meagre salary of N65, 000, an amount that cannot buy you a bag of rice?

The good old days are gone when the children of elites and those of the poor were taught under the same roof of the classroom. I vividly remember my time at Government Unity Secondary School, Gummi, where children of ordinary citizens and the upper class studied side by side. Our classrooms brought together students from all walks of life, including the children of governors, commissioners, wealthy individuals, and prominent traditional rulers like the Sultan and Emirs; today, those glory days have become history. Today, nowhere can the children of the wealthy and elites meet with the children of the poor, neither at school nor at the market or social gathering. A division and red line of cycles has been created for each class: While the elites' children are schooling in private schools

whether within or outside the country, the children of poor and vulnerable citizens are left in public schools with dilapidated buildings and unqualified, half-baked teachers.

Recent waves of graduation ceremonies of elites' children in the UK, USA and other foreign institutions have sparked a lot of fuss and negative reactions among Nigerians, especially on social and online media (Olugbode, 2026; Punch Nigeria, 2025 January 5). Some of the politicians whose children recently graduated from school abroad include, but are not limited to, the children of the current FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike; former President, Goodluck Jonathan; Governor of Anambra State, Chukwuma Soludo; former Kano State Governor, Abdullahi Ganduje; former Zamfara State Governor, Abdulaziz Yari; current Jigawa State Governor, Umaru Namadi; and former defence minister and Governor of Jigawa State, Badaru Abubakar, among others (Ige, 2026 & Olatimehin, 2026). Nigerians have expressed outrage, especially after Nyesom Wike shared images of his son, Jordan Wike, graduating with a Master of Laws degree from Queen Mary University in London, UK (Ige, 2026).

The revelation has reignited a heated debate about the education system and the economic struggles faced by ordinary Nigerians. Critics argue that the persistent disparity between the elite and the general populace underscores the need for systemic change. Many commentators on the social media called on the government to implement policies that address educational inequalities and ensure that no child is left behind. Some comments and questions made by ordinary Nigerians carry the same tones; why can't these children study in the country their parents govern? Why is it always abroad? Why should elected officials send their children abroad while the children of the masses suffer in poorly maintained schools? This has also reignited the call for legislation to

mandate that elected officials, from councilors to the president, enroll their children in Nigerian schools. Proponents believe this policy would incentivize politicians to improve the education sector, ensuring better outcomes for all citizens. A Nollywood actor, Akah Nnani was quoted lamenting that, "We need laws that make it mandatory for politicians' children to school in Nigeria" (Israel, 2026).

Nigerian public universities have been through decades of underfunding, strikes, and infrastructural decline. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has gone on strike so often that a full academic calendar now feels like an exception rather than the norm. This is a dangerous trend Nigeria's education is drifting into, and the earlier our leaders realize and act, the better for the country.

4.2 Healthcare Segregation

A similar pattern emerges in the healthcare sector. Nigeria's health system is characterized by a profound disparity between wealthy Nigerians who have access to world-class private healthcare and those who do not (Commonwealth Fund, 2026). Yaqoob et al. (2026) examined income-related inequalities in access to inpatient healthcare among rural households in Nigeria and found that 81.4 percent, 49.9 percent, and 18.4 percent of respondents reported access to inpatient care at public primary, secondary, and tertiary health facilities, respectively, while 32.7 percent accessed private facilities. Critically, access to public primary and secondary inpatient care decreased with household wealth, whereas access to tertiary and private inpatient care increased with wealth. The study identified significant pro-rich inequalities in access to tertiary (CI = 0.2382) and private (CI = 0.1502) inpatient care, with economic status and region of residence identified as the largest contributors to these inequalities.

Okonta, et al. (2025) evaluates the link between socioeconomic status and health disparity in Nigeria by employing the concentration index, a standard metric for quantifying health-related inequalities. By analyzing household survey data and key health indicators spanning 1990 to 2022, the research measures how health outcomes vary across different income brackets. The results reveal stark health disparities, with lower-income groups suffering from significantly poorer health than their wealthier counterparts. Specifically, the pro-rich concentration index demonstrates that illiterate and impoverished populations bear a disproportionate burden of poor health compared to wealthier, more educated demographics. To address these gaps, the study recommends implementing subsidized medical care and expanding healthcare infrastructure within the most severely impacted geopolitical zones.

The Nigerian elites, including sitting presidents and governors, routinely fly to India, the UK, France, Germany or the US for routine medical care. Augustine in Daily Trust (2025, Jul 26) reports that former President Muhammadu Buhari and former military head of state General Abdulsalami Abubakar both received treatment in London, highlighting the embarrassing and dangerous over-reliance of Nigeria's elite on foreign health care. Nigerians spend an estimated \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually on medical tourism (Punch Editorial, 2025 Jul 25), a staggering drain on foreign reserves while primary healthcare centers and general hospitals across the country remain in disrepair (Augustine, 2025 Jul 26). Over 4,800 Nigerian-trained doctors moved to the United Kingdom between 2015 and 2023, with over 17,000 having left the country in the last decade (Augustine, 2025). In 2021, while the Nigerian resident doctors were on strike, the Saudi government recruited hundreds of Nigerian medical practitioners (BBC,

2021). A report by Punch newspaper revealed that no fewer than 20,966 Nigerian health workers relocated abroad within one year. The mass exodus includes 3,919 doctors, 7,487 nurses and midwives, 6,861 medical laboratory professionals, 702 pharmacists, 658 physiotherapists, and hundreds of other specialists, according to the State Health of the Nation report 2025 (Adediran & Tolu-Kolawole, 2026 July, 25). This institutional neglect signals that the state views quality health as a commodity, not a right.

4.3 The Symbolic Retreat and Spatial Segregation

The recent trend of wealthy families travelling to the UK/US with large entourages for graduation ceremonies acts as a "public spectacle of privilege." Elite Nigerian parents consume Western-based private schooling motivated by social distinction, social reproduction, and elite identity formation (Ayling, 2019). This sends a dangerous signal that success is no longer tied to building Nigeria, but to escaping it. Ayling (2024) demonstrates that elite parents construct British pedagogy as superior to Nigerian educational style and methodology, positioning international education as a form of distinction that enables children to think above others here in Nigeria. This is coupled with spatial segregation in markets and infrastructure. A socio-spatial equity analysis of emergency obstetric care accessibility in 15 Nigerian cities found that in 13 of 15 cities, travel time to the nearest public Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Care facility was lowest in the wealthiest 20 percent of neighbourhoods (Banke-Thomas *et al.*, 2024). In Lagos, the widest inequality gap was observed, with nine facilities reachable within 60 minutes for the wealthiest quintile versus zero for the poorest (Banke-Thomas *et al.*, 2024). Socioeconomic deprivation and long transit times to healthcare facilities constitute critical determinants of institutional delivery among pregnant

women in Africa; however, the magnitude of their influence exhibits substantial variations both subnationally and cross-nationally (Wong, *et al.*, 2020). The Guardian editorial (Ekpa, 2026 Jun 23) observes that "we live in one country, but we inhabit two different spheres. One is a sphere of privilege, comfort, and access which is reserved for the elite and their cronies, while the other is a domain of deprivation, indignity, and exclusion."

4.4 Socio-Political Consequences

The cumulative effect of these findings is the erosion of social cohesion. When 85 percent of the population is excluded from the fruits of citizenship such as access to quality education, healthcare, justice, opportunity, and voice, the society begins to fracture (Ekpa, 2026 Jun 23) cited in the guardian editorial. Social cohesion collapses, and crime rises; distrust becomes the norm. As one commentator notes, "What emerges is a society where everyone by every means possible tries to escape to the other sphere, not by merit, but by manipulation, patronage, or crime" as cited by Agbajileke (2025 Jan 23) in the Guardian newspaper. Falana in the Tribune online (2025 Aug 27) describes Nigeria as operating a "two-tier constitution" where "Without education, income, healthcare, housing, and social security, political and civil rights may be equal in law but unequal in practice, benefiting mainly the wealthy."

Social stratification creates structural barriers that perpetuate a cycle of inequality and hinder peaceful coexistence (Jato & Iordye 2025). The masses no longer believe in integrity or hard work as paths to success, realizing the system is rigged. Patriotism becomes a farce when elites preach "nation-building" while securing second passports abroad. Ekpa (2026 Jun 23) stated in the guardian newspaper that, "the society fractures into a survivalist mode, where dignity is reserved for those who can pay for it".

5. Policy Implications

A critical review of current policy trails reveals several deeply problematic implications for Nigeria's social fabric. While policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 and the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) Act exist on paper, Iordye and Jato (2026) argue that "incremental, access-focused reforms are insufficient" and that despite formal universalisation, approximately 10.5 to 18 million children remain out of school. The healthcare facility under the NHIA scheme reaches only a small percentage of citizens, that is, public servants, who are no more than 4% of the entire country's population (Iordye & Jato, 2026). The most significant policy implication is that the state indirectly supports the rich by underfunding public services and allowing the private sector to expand, enabling the wealthy to escape poor conditions while majority are left behind.

Furthermore, the policy direction of "Subsidy Removal" and aggressive privatization carries the implication of further commodifying basic social goods. The rapid growth of private education providers has turned education into a commodity, creating inequality and threatening every child's right to quality education (Education International, 2026). The continued allowance of public officials to seek foreign medical treatment, using public funds, carries the devastating implication that the state does not trust its own systems, thereby giving ordinary citizens implicit permission to also abandon faith in the state. The Federal Government has defended foreign medical trips, arguing that individuals are free to seek treatment anywhere in the world (Egobiambu, Channels TV, 2024), a stance that legitimizes elite abandonment of the domestic health system.

Another implication is the critical regulatory consequence: the absence of a framework mandating private schools and hospitals to contribute to the public good means that the elite's private investments exist in a vacuum, extracting resources from the system without reinvesting in broader society. Finally, the policy of treating public infrastructure as a "residual" good, only for those who cannot afford alternatives, implies that the Nigerian state has quietly abandoned its constitutional duty to guarantee the welfare of all citizens, effectively normalizing a two-tier citizenship where dignity is a purchasable commodity, not an inalienable right (Agbajileke, 2025 Jan 23; Falana, 2025 August 27)

6. Recommendations

To reverse the trend of a two-class society and rebuild a shared national identity, the following measures are urgently recommended:

1. **Radical Budgetary Reallocation:** The Federal and State governments should immediately increase the education and health budgets to meet or exceed UNESCO (15–20% of public expenditure) and WHO (15% of GDP) recommendations.
2. **Mandatory Public Service Contribution:** Government to introduce a policy mandating that all private schools and hospitals, especially those serving the elite, dedicate a percentage of their annual surplus to adopt and revitalize at least one underperforming public institution in their catchment area (Public-Private Partnership for Common Good).
3. **Ban on Official Foreign Medical Trips:** Government to enact legislation prohibiting public officials at the federal and state levels from seeking routine medical care abroad, with the cost of their treatment redirected to upgrading the National Teaching Hospitals. Reports from Daily Trust (Augustine, 2025 Jul 26) and

Punch (Agbajileke 2025, Jan 23) have both called for such a ban to force the elite to become stakeholders in the local system.

4. **Revitalization of "Common Ground" Infrastructure:** Invest heavily in improving the appearance, safety, security and functionality of public parks, roads, and transport systems in poor neighbourhoods to reintegrate the spatial inequality and reconnect communities with the wider nation.

5. **Progressive Taxation on Conspicuous Consumption:** Introduce luxury levies on high-end private school fees, international travel for non-essential purposes, and high-value imported consumables. Oxfam (Makinta, 2025 Jan 19) reports that, in Nigeria, report by the Federal Inland Revenue Service has it that only 40 wealthy individuals pay taxes". The other question is whether the taxes they pay are fair to the income/profit they make Revenue generated must be funneled directly into the national social safety net.

6. **Anti-Corruption and Transparency Portals:** Implement digital real-time dashboards for the tracking of public funds allocated to social services, allowing citizens to hold the government accountable for every naira spent.

7. **Strengthen Regulation of Private Provision:** There is an urgent need for better regulation of private services, providing targeted support to vulnerable households, aligning education with job opportunities, and linking education policies with poverty reduction and social protection strategies.

7. Conclusion

Nigeria is at a critical point. The country is increasingly divided between the wealthy, who live in a highly developed private world, and the poor, who struggle to meet their basic needs. This growing class divide is not accidental; it is reinforced by the withdrawal of elites from public

institutions such as schools, hospitals, and infrastructure. Evidence shows that wealth and access to quality services are closely connected, while private education and healthcare increasingly benefit those who can afford them. This allows privilege to be passed from one generation to another.

The effects are thoughtful. Rising inequality, declining public services, and unequal opportunities are weakening social cohesion and reducing citizens' trust in government and society. However, this trend can still be reversed. Nigeria needs to strengthen public institutions and ensure that quality education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other essential services are available to everyone, regardless of income. The goal should be to create a society where the child of a taxi driver has the same opportunity to succeed as the child of a billionaire. Nigeria's stability and unity depend on closing this growing gap between the rich and the poor.

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