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Structural Poverty in Nigeria: Exploring the Politico-Administrative Elite Nexus

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Abstract

Nigeria witnessed immense national development cum prosperity immediately after independence from 1960-1966. However, the narratives changed from prosperity to poverty and, from nationalism to corrupt selfish leadership, leading to the country being ranked among the top fragile states in the world. This study traced the inherent politico-administrative elite foundations that created and are currently sustaining Nigeria's poverty, despite millions of dollars earned from oil revenue and abundant human resources. A documentary research approach was adopted. We descriptively content analyzed data sourced from the UN, Fund for Peace, UNDP, and the National Bureau of Statistics 'NBS' survey reports on poverty and underdevelopment indices in Nigeria. The findings revealed among other things that the foundations of Nigeria's poverty are tied to long military misrules, shoddy federalism, and ethno-religious divides driving the imbalances in the politico-administrative elite misgovernance system, upon which various dimensions of poverty are perpetrated against the populace. Poverty in Nigeria, therefore, is manmade and is driven by the politico-administrative elites through the instruments of public bureaucracies and other institutions of governance. Poverty in Nigeria is rooted in the 1999 Constitution, thus structurally designed and infused into the social system. We recommend restructuring; and true federalism, to pave the way for the auto-centric response of the polity to the socioeconomic realities that will cure Nigeria's poverty and underdevelopment.

Keywords: *Politico-administrative elite, structural poverty, structural violence, underdevelopment, human resource development.*

Introduction

The question between poverty and prosperity lies in the economy. However, in a polity, the economy does not exist in isolation. Thus, the intrigues in the dynamics of the political economy of any nation determine its wealth or poverty at the macroeconomic level of the society. Ake (2002), notes that the superstructure of a society plays a

critical role in shaping and influencing whether a national economy is repressive or not, especially when inequality controls the distribution of economic resources. Therefore, the sociopolitical and economic equality or inequality prevalent in a polity goes a long way in leading people into poverty, limiting people in a vicious cycle of poverty, or leading people out of poverty to prosperity. The reason is that no matter how hard and intelligent a people work, a faulty and repressive political economy framework can only produce nothing but mass poverty, not mass prosperity. The reality of the poor political economy framework facing Nigeria according to Aduma, Onah, & Asadu (2023) is the basis upon which calls for economic restructuring of the country are predicated as a panacea for Nigeria's poverty and underdevelopment.

Nigeria is richly endowed in human and material resources, yet she is so poor that the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022), survey report notes that 133 million Nigerians fall under the trap of multidimensional poverty, whereas the Brookings Institution (2018) global survey study on poverty conducted, using World Poverty Clock Index, reported that Nigeria has overtaken India to become the poverty capital of the world. This is a strong contradiction. Despite the enormous foreign revenue generated from the sales of crude oil products, the economic result from North to South, and from East to West of Nigeria, is nothing but stinking poverty and deprivations with indicators that manifest in diseases, hunger, preventable deaths, squalor, crimes, lack of basic amenities that make life meaningful, illiteracy, insecurity, corruption, brain and skill drains, and underdevelopment (Aduma et al., 2023; Onah, Asadu, & Amujiri, 2022a; 2022b). The dominion effect of the results of poverty according to Danaan (2018) is the undeniable multiplier effects on the poor health status of the people, lack of human security, poor quality education, low life expectancy, and distorted relationships.

Poverty according to the World Bank (1996) is the incapacitation of a people to be unable to meet basic human needs such as shelter, food, healthcare, education, and participation in socio-political and economic activities. Poverty in Africa is a shocking reality (Beegle, Christiciensen, Dabalen, & Gaddis, 2016), especially in Nigeria with its precarious inequality and adverse chain reactions. Omoyibo (2013) describes the overwhelming suffering in Nigeria as a paradox-poverty amidst plenty. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022) report on poverty and inequality in Nigeria states that "the national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is 0.257, indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience

just over one-quarter of all possible deprivations”. Nigeria in the recent past especially from 2015 to date has consistently tested negative to many indices used for measuring development which in the long run reflect national prosperity or poverty. Hence, Nigeria is not just underdeveloped and poor but an epitome of poverty by all standards.

Nigeria being ranked as the global headquarters of poverty is also being ravaged by the high rate of unemployment and inequality. Thus, the structural problems of unemployment and inequality have exacerbated poverty in Nigeria. In other words, the more the rate of unemployment in a country, the likelihood of more poor in such a society. Wale (2018) noted that unemployment in Nigeria according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report was 23% in 2018, with 21 million Nigerians unemployed, thereby making Nigeria rank among the countries with the highest rates of unemployment in Africa. In 2020, unemployment in Nigeria from Q2 - Q4 surged to a 6.2% increase thereby resulting in a 33.3% unemployment rate in Nigeria (NBS, 2021).

Nigeria's future from the early years after her independence (1960-1966) was blossoming with promises of national development cum prosperity as evident in the giant strides of developments recorded by each of the four regions (East, West, North, and Mid-west) (Onah, Asadu, & Amujiri, 2022b). This is a result of the drive, sincerity of purpose, and the high spirit with which independence was won by the nationalists who were patriotic and selflessly equipped with the desire to build a great nation. Hence, democratic federalism was instituted based on the principles of regionalism that were adopted. This fertilized the ground for healthy sociopolitical and economic policies, and competition among the four regions in Nigeria, thus providing economic stimuli that boosted the political economy framework and the infrastructure of the four regions and Nigeria at large. With the passage of time, the military struck in 1966; disrupted the already institutionalized democratic regional federalism, and took over governmental power by force. Henceforth, the foundations for Nigeria's sorrow and journey into poverty were laid by the military junta in 1966 (see Ugwuoke, Ajah, & Onyejegbu, 2020).

This study, therefore, intends to trace the politico-administrative root causes and the dimensions of the disconnections in the political economy framework that disrupted the collective social progress and prosperity achieved earlier (1960-1966), thereby forcing Nigeria into structural poverty and underdevelopment. There are many studies on poverty in Nigeria, which includes (Ajani, 2008; Ucha, 2010; Dauda,

2002; Ele-Ojo et al., 2013; Oshewolo, 2010; John, 2014; Ogujiub, 2014; Afeez & Amiena, 2020; Olukayode et al., 2020; Cordelia, 2019) among others. However, these studies are inadequate in unraveling the politico-administrative dimensions of the structural disconnect inherent in the political economy framework of Nigeria, right from the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern Protectorates to the 1966 jettisoning of regional federalism, down to the present 1999 faulty constitutional foundations, serving as the loci of Nigeria's poverty. Thus, this gap identified is what this study seeks to address in the literature to locate the exact politico-administrative root causes of poverty in Nigeria, which is structurally infused into the foundations of the social system and institutions of governance that produce impediments that impoverish the citizens.

Materials and methods

The study focuses on poverty generated by the structural imbalances or violence in Nigeria's polity. A documentary approach was used in sourcing data from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN), books, journal articles, and internet materials authored by experts and experienced writers to x-ray the dynamics of the politico-administrative imbalances generating poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Also, the study leveraged data evidence ascertained principally from the UN agencies' surveys and publications of the findings from authorities in Nigeria like the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) which is saddled with the primary responsibility of gathering data on poverty and reporting important statistics to the people. These culminate to give credence to the authenticity of the documentary approach and data gathered and descriptively content analyzed, regarding the politico-administrative imbalances responsible for the massive structural poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Thus, the results obtained from this study will be valid in addressing the subject matter of the discourse and proffering solutions to the problem of structural poverty in the polity.

The theoretical framework of analysis

The theory of structural violence was popularized by Johan Galtung in 1969 and advanced in 1990 when he elaborated the concepts of positive and negative peace, and cultural violence respectively, as manifestations of social structures that are anti-people, anti-development, anti-peace,

and anti-prosperity, which are built into how societies are governed, thereby promoting violence or conflicts (Galtung, 1969; 1990). The result of structural violence is demonstrated through unequal power and unequal life chances that often produce poverty amongst a people. Therefore, poverty is a form of conflict built into Nigeria's social system as embedded in the lopsided 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, which deprives the citizens of maximizing their full potential and consequently remain impoverished (Onah, Asadu, & Amujiri, 2022a; 2022b; Aduma et al., 2023). Structural violence or structural conflict as the case may be is often unnoticeable and manifests through unemployment, preventable deaths, social exclusion, poverty, repression, diseases, social alienation, and other social structures and conditions that often make life unbearable and unfulfilling for a people (Bandy, 2019; Udegbonam, 2017). Structural imbalances or violence is evident in bad governance that is facilitated by bad social structures and systems which produce the deplorable conditions that make life unbearable and worthless for a people caged in poverty, following faulty social structures; foundations, laws, policies, and injustices in a polity. The dominant argument and the basic assumption in structural violence is that poverty, conflict, and other inhuman conditions witnessed in a polity are infused into the specific patterns societies are structured and organized to function (Ademola, 2006).

Structural violence theory is leveraged in the analysis of the politico-administrative root causes of poverty in Nigeria. Therefore, the developing patterns of poverty in Nigeria are traced to the structural impediments embedded in the politico-administrative social systems existing from the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, which gave birth to the unholy union called Nigeria, and the anti-prosperity structures created by the military and infused in the 1999 Constitution, before handing over power to civilian rule in 1999. According to Oluwatobi (2018), and Ugwuoke et al. (2020) Nigeria was not created for the benefit of the various ethnic groups that made up the country, but as a British geo-political sphere, an area of economic interest, and control, for profit-making. The structure of what is known as Nigeria today, right from the 1886 Royal Niger Company concession by Britain to Sir George T. Goldie, down to the amalgamation of 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard, to 1960 independence, up to 2023, is nothing but a cartel-like structure built for the economic interest of the Western world and a few indigenous politico-

administrative ruling elites who often gang up against the masses and the state for their selfish interest.

Nigeria was solely designed to profit the British political and economic interests. This is the fundamental purpose of colonialism. Nigeria from the inception of colonialism till date was never structured to facilitate development and to build a prosperous nation and happy citizens, except from (the 1960-1966 period of regionalism, when each region had the power to develop at its own pace). Rodney (1972) observed that colonialism was a commercial venture established by the British, and never provided genuine development. Rather, the Colonialists concentrated installations of infrastructure in the areas where there were cash crops and raw materials for easy evacuation to seaports, for onward movements to Europe and America continents. However, this led to the concentration of development only in a few areas where the White men lived known as Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) (Obodoechie, 2009), and consequently polarized Nigeria into two communities known as the rural and the urban enclaves, which was not so before the arrival of the Colonialist (Onah, 2017). This accounts for the rural neglect and the massive poverty witnessed in the rural areas in Nigeria. Another name for 'rural area' in Nigeria is 'poverty area'. The polarization is a subtle structural violence against the rights of the inhabitants of the rural areas, who are now neglected in the distributions and allocations of infrastructure and social services that serve as a launching pad for people to overcome poverty and underdevelopment. This is evidenced in the wide multidimensional poverty gap between urban areas and rural areas in terms of poverty and development indexes in Nigeria (see National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

This pattern of concentration of development only in the urban areas was adopted and continued by the Nigerian political class after independence (Igboeli, 1992) thereby structurally segregating and distorting development, leading to widespread poverty in the land. This pattern of segregated and structured development that focuses only on one locality/sector (urban areas) does not give room for trickledown effects or backwash effects and consequently negates forward and backward socioeconomic linkages in development. The result of lopsided underdevelopment informed the structuralist' dominant perspective that poverty, disease, injustice, unemployment, deprivation, inequality, oppression, exploitation, alienation, and violent social crimes occur in society as a result of political, institutional, and social exclusions

built into society in favour of certain groups against others (see Ademola, 2006; Udegbonam, 2017).

Historical foundations of Nigeria's shoddy federalism: the beginning of the journey into politico-administrative imbalances breeding poverty and underdevelopment

The desire for independence was fought with courage among Nigerians with the optimism to build a strong and just nation, where development and prosperity are envisaged to be the order of the day (Francis, 2017; Joseph, 2017). Following the unity of purpose and the capacity built and sustained during the fight for independence, within three years after independence, Nigeria became a Republic. In the First Republic that began in 1963, that is, not too long after independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted a Republican Constitution in 1963 based on the principles of regional federalism - where powers, authorities, jurisdictions, and responsibilities were shared between the federal and the four regional governments (Asadu, 2017). This arrangement granted absolute autonomy to each region to grow and develop at its pace. The sole purpose of the 1963 Republican Constitution that came into effect not too long after independence was to 'consolidate' the 1960 Constitution which was a catalyst for regional autonomy and healthy fiscal federalism, thereby setting the pace for a new dawn (development) in the polity. The 1963 Republican Constitution became the first indigenously drafted law by the Nigerians, made wholly by the representatives of the indigenous populations without any iota of foreign or British interference/influence. Henceforth, Nigeria got its foundations (Constitution) right for the first time, and as a result, the country started doing fine in economic prosperity, to the extent of being rated high with enormous prospects for development in general.

The people having laid the right foundations for prosperity in the polity began to thrive as the country was competing favourably in all major global indices for measuring social progress/development. Nigeria was rated at par with Brazil, and a few other emerging economies across the globe, especially from the Asian countries like Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc. striving for national development and economic prosperity (see Mailafia, 2008; Chambers, 2016). Between 1960 -1966, Nigeria recorded huge development in the major indices used for measuring national development and economic prosperity. But all of a sudden, the military paradigm shift – a coup struck in 1966 and

shattered the economic gains made – the developments achieved; solid foundations laid, and prospects created from the continuous practice and existence of regional federalism as entrenched in the 1963 Republican Constitution of Nigeria. With the military in power, Ugwuoke, Ajah, & Onyejebu (2020) remarked that flagrant abuse of fundamental human rights, killings, silencing of opposition, and any form of critique received incarceration or immediate extermination.

Nigeria's journey into poverty precisely took off from the 1966 military coup that abrogated the regional federalism; thereby discarding true federalism in which powers; jurisdictions, authorities, autonomy, responsibilities, etc. were spelled out in the Constitution and decentralized to the four regions (East, West, North, and Mid-west) that made up the configurations of power relations in Nigeria, from 1963-1966. The era of regional federalism according to Onah, Asadu, & Amujiri (2022b) was the days of economic prosperity in Nigeria when resource control was domiciled with the regional governments, now state governments. Thus, regionalism that was fully expressed in the decentralization of power and autonomy was jettisoned to pave the way for the first 12 states created in Nigeria by the military regime of General Yakubu Gown in 1967, all in the bid to frustrate Colonel Emeka Ojukwu and to stop the Biafra nation from gaining independence from Nigeria. Henceforth, Nigeria was plugged into a unitary system of government that is cloaked like a federal system, as it is erroneously and misleadingly referred to as the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). But in practice, it lacks the major tenets/principles of federalism such as obtained in other federating units across the globe (see el Rufia, 2017; Bayo, 2021; Nwoko; 2021; Onah et al., 2022b).

Every iota of federalism was deprived of the initial 12 states but now 36 states of the federation plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, which were all created by the erstwhile Northern Nigerian military heads of state through military fiats (Aduma et al., 2023). The implication of the shoddy federalism in Nigeria according to Omilusi (2020) is that the balkanized Nigeria federation has not worked especially since after the civil war in the 1970s, thereby generating anger, frustration, and resentment as evident in the proliferation of ethnic groups' agitations. In recent times, the tempo has been increased from a mere agitation to balance the imbalances infused in the Constitution, to a full-blown agitation calling for a referendum by different ethnic nationalities desirous of becoming independent from the poverty-stricken Nigerian state.

Furthermore, the manner of the states' creations and their consequent deprivations of the tenets of federalism lacked respect for the people. Thus, it fails to incorporate the true aspirations and yearnings of the indigenous populations. Just like the amalgamation of 1914 by the Colonialists, the indigenous people of present-day Nigeria were yoked and unyoked by the military across unwanted cultural and ethnic divides, thereby failing to recognize the true wishes of the people in state creation. This is because no consultation and no consensus were reached before creating any of the states; rather they deployed military fiats in the creations. The military through fiats was creating states and local governments abusively at will, specifically, to favour the North against the South, and without considering certain fundamental economic principles of statehood like the economic viability of the states; tax paying ability of the population, internally generated revenue sources, etc. were ignored.

In the history of state creation in Nigeria, only the military created the 36 states under different regimes. The regimes were all headed by the Northern military heads of state. The sole reason for this lopsidedness occasioned by favouritism was identified by Odoh (2010) that Southern Nigeria has many resources to sustain the region, while the North has a deficit of resources and is unable to sustain basic governance, let alone other economic exigencies required for development and prosperity of the region. Therefore, with more states and local governments in the north, they have access to more political power; and more representatives in both the upper and the lower Chambers of the National Assembly. Impliedly, this lopsided arrangement, makes the North have more federal allocations of revenue/funds to develop their region (based on the principles of landmass, population, etc.) more than the Southern region where the wealth of the nation is generated from, and consequently impoverishes the South (Asadu & Nwofia, 2018). Despite all these, the level of poverty in the North is still more than that of the South in Nigeria.

The North having dominated political power in Nigeria easily perpetrates and infuses imbalances into the political economy framework and administrative system of Nigeria, and thus legitimizes the same through the power of the constitutional backings. This trend of schemed lopsidedness is often patterned after the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by Lord Frederick Lugard, which was designed to move away resources from the South to the North, to aid the British administration of the vast territories called

Nigeria with cheaper funds instead of to enhance development and prosperity in the two regions (Mohammed, 2013; Ugwuoke et al., 2020; Isiani & Obi-ani, 2020). Nigeria's poverty is rooted in this politico-administrative shoddy arrangement where resources are consciously taken away from those whose localities the wealth/resources are produced, to another region with minimal or untapped resources, thereby impoverishing both regions in the long run. This has been the philosophy behind the creation of more states and local governments in the North to have more federal revenue allocations generated from the South going to the North. But to sustain these unsustainable states created through military fiat, the same military, directly and indirectly, influenced the lopsided 1999 Constitution of Nigeria that were allegedly drafted to favour the North more than the South in all indices. On this account, Asadu & Nwofia (2018) noted that "the military before hand over of political power to civilian government on May 29th, 1999, promulgated into law the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria."

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) is allegedly a fraudulent document because it fails to incorporate the fundamental truth (basic principles of federalism) that should have been the foundation upon which the Constitution stands and revolves (Bayo, 2021). Since the intent of those who drafted the Constitution was to allow one ethno-religious group/region to dominate others, the Constitution lacked merit and did not reflect the popular will of the masses. The Nigerian Constitution is alleged to be fraudulently drafted, and deliberately not implemented comprehensively. An example is the Federal Character principle which the current ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party has deliberately violated consistently. Thus, the APC government has refused to implement the Federal Character in sharing positions in public institutions, and allocation of infrastructure. The constitution is entirely parallel to its intent to the extent that Section 14 2(b) states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government" (Constitution of Nigeria, 1999). But in reality, lack of 'security and welfare' in Nigeria are the strongest indicators of failures of governance that unleash poverty on the people.

Furthermore, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) in Section 44 (3) states inter alia that: "*Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this section, the entire property in and control of all minerals, mineral oils, and natural gas in and under or upon any land in Nigeria or in, under or upon the territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Nigeria shall be vested in*

the Government of the Federation and shall be managed in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly". This is pure anti-federalism. Wheare (1964) prescribes that autonomy to own and control resources found in each region's jurisdiction or state is a true hallmark of federalism. But the case of Nigeria is different as the same inordinate intent manifests in Section 162 Subsections 1-10 that makes states and local governments depend on the federal government for funds (monthly allocations) even though the revenues are generated from the states and local governments in their backyards.

Onuigbo (2015), posits that the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) was introduced in Nigeria as far back as the Second Republic in 1981, by President Shehu Shagari's administration. This further weakens the lower tiers of government, especially with the current Section 153 that created the Federal Commissions and Councils and by extension the creation of a Commission called the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) in Section 153(n), charged to manage revenue generation and distribution in Nigeria, with Section 162 called Distributable Pool Account, in which Section 162 (1) of it states that: "the federation shall maintain a special account to be called "the Federation Account" into which shall be paid all revenues collected by the Government of the federation..." These financial management and economic laws embedded in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria are anti-federalism. The constitutional structures take away the power and resources to create and build wealth from the people and hand it over to the federal government thereby impoverishing the people. This is a structured violence. Davidson (1992) cited in Ebegbulem (2011) notes that Nigeria's federalism is defective and fallible because the federal structure has consistently jeopardized the basic philosophical tenets of federalism. He further states that "the relative autonomy, independence, and self-determination of these units must be appreciated and guaranteed in clear terms." Unfortunately, these are not so in Nigeria's federalism.

Constitutionally, Nigeria is said to be practicing federalism, but in the actual sense, she does not abide by the basic principles of federalism. This is the origin of the concept of 'true federalism' or 'shoddy federalism' in Nigeria's political discourse. Therefore, scholars unanimously agreed that Nigeria does not abide by the principles of federalism, that is, 'true federalism'; rather Nigeria practices 'shoddy federalism'. For example, the FGN's refusal to restructure Nigeria to decentralize security, and devolution of power to give full autonomy and

resource control to states, which are the basic principles of federalism (Wheare, 1964; Ebegbulem, 2011) obtained across other federations in the world, is a clear indication of lack of the principles of federalism - 'true federalism' in Nigeria. Therefore, the lack of application of the principles of federalism in Nigeria is what breeds poverty and underdevelopment in the country.

Ethno-religious roots of poverty in Nigeria

Nigerians have never been impoverished since its amalgamation in 1914 like in recent times; following the activities of violent sects birthed along ethno-religious cleavages. The ethno-religious violent statement allegedly credited to a strong Northern leader, Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto and first Premier of Northern Nigeria reads: "*The new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather, Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the North as willing tools and the South as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us and have control over their future*" (Francis, 2017; Joseph, 2017). This kind of mindset produces nothing but ethno-religious divisiveness that encourages domineering spirits that work through violence in a multiethnic country like Nigeria, thereby producing nothing but poverty and underdevelopment in the long run.

Lack of merit characterizes public sector appointments and generally the politico-administrative system of governance in Nigeria, leading to poor quality leadership that is full of incompetency; unpatriotic, and lacks the zeal required to drive national prosperity (Onah, 2023; 2017). Nepotism and favouritism rooted in ethno-religious bonds determine who gets what offer, contract, appointment, job, office, etc. in Nigeria. People are appointed to public offices based on what Ezeodili (2009) describes as 'appoint the bearer's syndrome' where offices are allocated based on a system known as political patronage and god-fatherism, instead of merit principles or technical competence. In other words, Section 14(3) of the Constitution of Nigeria that made provisions for the federal character and merit principles (Constitution of Nigeria, 1999) are jettisoned in the appointment and recruitment of public officials in Nigeria. Thus, the structure of Nigeria's social system violets individual rights of citizens to equality, fairness, and merit in the allocation of public offices, appointments, and contracts. The result of this is multidimensional poverty driven by corrupt politico-administrative elites who gang up against the populace and the state as they loot the

resources meant for development thereby impoverishing the people (Onah et al., 2022a; Onah, 2023).

Generally, President Buhari's first term in office from 2015 to the end of his second term in May 2023 has been heavily criticized due to his ethno-religious sentiments in appointments. It is believed that a substantial percentage of the juicy posts in Nigeria during Buhari's presidency were given to the Northern Fulani ethnic nationality from Moslem extraction and/or to a few Southwest Moslems, not based on competence but on ethno-religious linings (see Eme & Okeke, 2017; Udeh, Ovaga, & Ogu, 2023). The same trend has allegedly continued in the current President Bola Tinubu's regime, where juicy national positions and appointments are allocated to the Yoruba Southwest ethnic nationality, where the president comes from. All these premeditated lopsided appointments breed mediocrity and hatred that are impoverishing the system and the citizens because both the job and the people suffer in the hands of incompetent office holders, who call themselves leaders without delivering significant values to improve life and move people away from poverty to riches.

Discussion of findings

Expositions from extant literature and the result of findings from scholarly works such as Aduma, Onah, & Asadu (2023), Paul et al. (2022), Onah (2023), and Onah et al. (2022a; 2022b) corroborate with the findings of this study that the structural violence fused in the social systems by the politico-administrative elite is responsible for the multidimensional poverty, and underdevelopment ravaging Nigeria. Therefore, the politico-administrative elites who govern the society impoverish the citizens and consequently underdevelop Nigeria through misgovernance, oppression, deprivations, suppressions, insecurity, and other sundry forms in which structural violence manifest, especially through laws and policies that undermine the welfare and social progress of the people (see Bandy, 2019; Udegbnam, 2017). For example, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria allegedly is agreed by the majority of Nigerians to be fraudulently lopsided, imbalanced, and incapable of delivering socio-economic progress and development (Aduma et al., 2023; Bayo, 2021). Hence, every government that comes to power promises to restructure the country during campaigns to pave the way for economic prosperity and development, but eventually fails to do so throughout its tenure. The insecurity in Nigeria, a major cause of

poverty is blamed on the inability or unwillingness of the FGN to decentralize security as done in other federations in the world (Nwoko, 2021; Onah, Aduma, & Eze, 2023).

The poverty and underdevelopment prevalent in Nigeria despite abundant human and material resources are caused by the politico-administrative elite gangs that operate through corrupt means (Onah, Asadu, & Amujiri, 2022). The result of the failure of the politico-administrative elites to deliver dividends of democracy to the people is at the centre of ranking Nigeria as the poverty capital of the world, a failed/fragile state, low on human capital development, and the 3rd most terrorized country in the world (see Brookings Institution, 2019; Fund for Peace, 2019; UNDP, 2019; Global Terrorism Index, 2020). Poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria correlate, and are elite-driven. The Nigerian politico-administrative elites who govern society undermine the principles of democracy to enable them to easily access political power, use power, retain power, and transfer power to their cronies (Onah, 2023). Hence, the prevalence of the 'structures of criminality' in the Nigerian political space according to Peter Obi is the bane of the leadership failure that drives poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. These structures of criminality suggest that Nigeria is tilting towards a criminal state (Akin, 2022). Democracy, therefore, has failed to deliver prosperity and development in Nigeria, because of the structural violence imposed in the social system by the politico-administrative elites in power.

Conclusion and recommendations

Poverty in Nigeria is manmade and driven through the institutions of governance. The political elites perpetuate poverty through the 1999 Constitution (laws), and the instruments of public bureaucracies used to institutionalize poverty and inequality in the social system. Poverty in Nigeria is structurally designed and infused into the social system and institutions of governance. The faulty socio-political structures are evident in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, and thus, have to be overhauled or restructured to enable the system to respond to the socioeconomic realities as solutions that will cure Nigeria's poverty. Hence, we recommend that Nigeria should go back to the practice of true federalism as obtained in developed societies, where states will have more power to control resources in their regions/states and be able to provide social goods, services, and infrastructure to the citizens, thereby

empowering the people to live above poverty. The states and local governments should have the power to control resources located in their domains and provide security, and not the current situation where most of the functions of the states that would have brought prosperity to the people are hijacked by the federal government as contained in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria in Section 4(2) and Schedule 2 Part 1 of the 'Exclusive Legislative List'. Many of the 68 responsibilities itemized in the 'Exclusive Legislative List' belong to the states in other federations. Thus, these functions should be returned to the states and local governments to enable them to deliver dividends of democracy that will usher in economic prosperity and development in the country.

More importantly, expositions from the extant literature suggest that the Constitution of Nigeria is not supreme as claimed. Top-ranking politicians (executives and parliaments) deliberately violate the law such as the Federal Character without consequences. The reason is that the judiciary is either weak and/or is in connivance with the politicians. Therefore, Nigeria's judiciary should uphold the law without fear or favour, thereby restoring justice and sanity in the land, as the last hope of the common man. If the judiciary cannot hold the executives and the parliaments accountable when they violate the constitution as they often do, be it in appointments/employments, or in any other matters of law, it is finished for Nigeria, as we are gradually witnessing from pre and post-elections judgments from the courts. Thus, accountability is at a very low ebb and shall only be restored by an incorruptible judicial system. In other words, accountability will force politicians to provide infrastructure, social justice, and an enabling environment required for the citizens to thrive economically. These will ensure merit; and facilitate job creation for the people to work, earn money, and live above poverty line.

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