



# Freedom in Penury and Affluence in Confinement: The Perfidy of Democracy in Nigeria

**Badmus Bidemi Gafar**

University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Center, Ibadan

Email: [badmus.bidemi@dlc.ui.edu.ng](mailto:badmus.bidemi@dlc.ui.edu.ng)

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## Abstract

The damaging wave of an increasing socio-economic inequality within and among people has become more pronounced and imminent due to undemocratic nature of Nigerian democracy. Thus, result in palpable fear, insecurity and lack of trust among the rich, the poor, the government and governmental institutions. The poor are economically disempowered and presumably enjoying thralldom freedom with no hope of situational change, while the rich are living in opulence but in confinement and in perpetual fear for insecurity of their private properties with little hope of unhindered freedom as a result of the likely backlash that gross socio-economic inequality deliberately orchestrated and sustained by the political system in Nigeria could engender. This paper therefore, argued that there can never be mutual trust, adequate security and national peace in Nigeria unless the country nascent democracy is rescued away from the political vampires and democracy exploiters particularly by true radical democrats that would ensure institutional reform, social justice, fair distribution of national resources and entrenchment of middle class which has long disappeared in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Freedom; Democracy; Inequality; Poverty; Institutional reform; Insecurity.

## 1. Introduction

It is instructive to note that the contemporary world system is shadowed by inequality. However, there is variation in the way different countries have reacted to inequality situation in order to foreclosed impoverishment and such reactions has been greatly influenced by the existing state institutions in those countries. Thus, existence of viable government institutions are presumed as very vital to both human and national prosperity especially if we considered how different institutions create incentives for its inhabitants.

Emerging trends of inequality has become the critical challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; which has intense implications for the health, security, and backlash effects on democracies everywhere. As rightly stressed by [International IDEA \(2017\)](#), inequality has potential to generates the fears of social decline and exclusion that feeds social polarization and the shrinking of a vital moderate centre. It can also severely skew political voice and representation towards those who have resources and power. More worrisome is that, inequality can create imbalances in voice, representation, opportunity and access that disenfranchise segments of the population, and undermine trust in (and support for) democracy. This kind of alienation can also increase support for populist and extremist views and violent conflict—particularly among young people.

Yet democratic regimes' ability to perform both economically and socially remains mixed at best. Moreover, while poverty levels have improved globally since the 1980s, and inequality between countries has declined considerably, inequality *within* countries is at a historic high ([IMF, 2015](#); [Piketty, 2014](#); [World Bank, 2016](#)). As I have earlier alluded, the levels and trends in average inequality are quite different across countries and regions. However, inequality remains greater in developing countries like Nigeria than in developed economies of Euro-Americans and the Asian Tigers.

There are number of factors that account for variations in terms of poverty and inequality both within and between the developed and developing nations. For instance, [Acemoglu and Robinson \(2012\)](#) argued that, each society functions with a set of economic and political rules created and enforced by the state and the citizens collectively. The economic institutions shape the economic incentives: the incentive to become educated, to save and invest, to innovate and adopt the technologies among other things. While the political institutions determine the ability of citizens to control politicians and influence how they behave. This in turn determine whether politicians are agents of the citizens or politicians are able to abuse the power entrusted to them, or that they have usurped to amass their own fortunes and to pursue their own agenda at the detriment to citizens' interests.

In another hand, there is also consensus that structural and economic trends exacerbate economic inequality. Among them is skill-based technological change in which machine tools, computers, and robots operated by high-skilled workers replace low-skilled workers; international trade and domestic outsourcing in which lower-paid workers are substituted for better-paid ones; and winner-take-all markets in which the most successful, not only in

athletics and entertainment but also in the corporate and financial sectors, are able to command stratospheric compensation (Atkinson, 2015; Dadush *et al.*, 2012).

Unfortunately, in Africa and many other developing countries where there are existence of weak state institutions that allow few privileged individual to captured state's economic and political power which has led to; widespread of poverty and gross inequality that have remained major obstacle to both human and national development, freedom and security of life and private properties are not adequately guaranteed. As an example, about 45% of the approximately 590 million people living in Africa are living below the poverty line; by implication, Nigeria host the larger percentage of the poor people in Africa being the most populous and despite its enormous human and material resources. To further explicating the foregoing account, it has been documented by [AfrAsia Bank Mauritius \(2019\)](#) Wealth Report in which Nigeria with its total net worth of \$225 billion where 9,900 people out of about 250 million people are holding most of the country's wealth thereby subjecting more than 90% of the population into precarious economic situation and poverty trap.

Arguably, the nature of politics in Nigeria has further complicated fair distribution of state resources and influenced leaderships' attitude toward equity and justice. Like a recurring decimal, representative democracy in Nigeria has become characterized with fierce scrambling for state power and resources due to the premium placed on wielding of political power. This in return has led to open disrespect for rule of law, quest for personal aggrandizement, gross inequality, widespread poverty and insecurity among other vices. Consequently, premium placed on wielding of political power has led to corruption and bifurcation of Nigerian society into two unhealthy classes of the super rich and extremely poor without consideration for the position of middle class which has long disappeared from Nigerian political dictionary. The forgone situation has continued to undermine democracy, weaken the social fabric of the society, make freedom meaningless to the poor, eroded mutual trust between the people and the government and foster fear of insecurity of life and private properties among the few rich in Nigeria.

Undoubtedly, the gross inequality does not only have consequences for the lives of individual people living in poor countries like Nigeria; it also causes grievances and resentment, with huge political and security implications. Therefore, understanding why the gross inequality and widespread of poverty persist amidst plenty of both human and material resources in Nigeria and why democracy in Nigeria has failed to guaranteed human development and generates prosperity among citizenry as postulated by Robert Dahl are parts of the focus in this paper. Above all, this paper attempts to develop intriguing ideas about how to reconcile the aspirations of the few rich with the agitations of the poor masses in order to build trust network relationship between the citizens and the government and to suggest the best methods on how government can stimulate citizens' support and trust for government institutions which in return will foster national peace, social justice, poverty reduction and bridged reasonable gap between the rich and the poor in the Nigeria.

In a nutshell, this paper is divided into five sections; introduction, conceptual exposition, understanding why the gross inequality and widespread of poverty persist, can democracy cure gross inequality and poverty in Nigeria vis-à-vis can gross inequality and poverty kill democracy in Nigeria?, conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. Conceptual Exposition**

### **2.1. Democracy**

Democracy as a concept is highly complex and it has depth interpretations within different people and among different nations. Thus account for the reason why democracy is one of the most widely debated concepts in the field of social sciences, particularly, in political science as a discipline. Simply put, democracy has no settled definition rather there are series of contending definitions and models of democracy ([Beetham, 1994](#); [Inkeless, 1991](#)). Democracy is of immense concern to every political scientist for the governance of human society, due to hopes it hold for the redemption of mankind in general and of Africa in particular ([Awa, 1992](#)).

In the same vein, [Robert \(1989\)](#), define democracy as instrumental in preventing rule by brutal and barbarous autocrats, guarantees citizens' hopes for fundamental rights, promotes a wide range of personal freedoms, helps people protect their own fundamental interests, offers the greatest opportunity for self-determination—the freedom to live under laws of one's own choosing—provides the greatest opportunity for the exercise of moral obligation, enhances human development, promotes a relatively high degree of political equality, fosters peace as modern representative democracies do not fight one another—and generates advancement.

To further corroborate the contending nature of democracy one might want to consider the debate between Liberal and Marxist perspectives on democracy. To the liberal perspective, "the essence of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. By interpretation, people should have the freedom to elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Thus by extension, liberal democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens" (Sodaro (2004) as cited in [Campbell \(2008\)](#)). Therefore, liberal perspective reinforces free choice of representatives.

Liberal democracy protégées were criticized for showing strengths only with regard to the fundamental principle of freedom while revealing substantial weaknesses concerning the fundamental principle of equality ([Campbell, 2008](#)). As observed by Campbell, liberal democracy fails in enforcing equality. Though, Liberal Democracy might have failed to achieve social equality, Marxist Democracy has also failed to support individual freedom. To the critics, Marxism's distinctive approach and contribution to democracy focuses on the objects of democratic decision-making: the 'what' of democracy's concerns and further emphasised 'true democracy,' which entailed "abolishing class differences," ([Wolff, 2009](#)) Thus, by putting the social equality over individual rights, Socialism intent to create a society truly democratic. In Marxist terms, the true Democracy is the de-facto equality between people, but not necessarily freedom of choice.

The foregoing contending perspectives and definitions of democracy are highly plausible given their contributions to our understanding on democracy. The logical conclusion that could be drawn from the diverse perspectives is the crucial roles of election, rule of law, and political participation by all in a democratic system. This suggests that election, popular participation, rule of law and democracy are inextricably interwoven (that is, one cannot be achieved without the others). In this sense, democracy also refers to both formal and informal institutional arrangements for collective decision making and a wide variety of deliberative decision making processes that incorporate core values of democracy in efforts to build and sustain peace (International IDEA, 2006).

## **2.2. Inequality**

Paradoxically, inequality is multi dimensional in nature and it manifest in many different forms. More often than not, developmental theorist and international development field often focuses on economic inequality, which is usually measured in terms of deficits in income and assets as they relate to individuals or households. More broadly, inequality encompasses many other dimensions and categorizations as well. These include inequality before the law in terms of basic political and socio-economic rights and freedoms, inequality of access and opportunity, inequality in essential capabilities (such as the ability to be healthy, educated or socially integrated), inequality of outcomes and distribution of resources, inequality in the distribution of power, and inequalities in social standing. In essence, inequality has both individual as well as collective implications. Succinctly put, inequality exists between individuals and households as well as between social groups and the society (Lustig, 2017).

By and large, inequality is shaped by access to and distribution of economic, political, social and cultural opportunities and it's become pronounced through a dynamic process of interaction and contestation between state and society over the distribution of power and resources. Typically, patterns of inequality and social exclusion are entrenched in the prevailing institutional arrangements and 'rules of the game' that underpin a given social and political system. In another hand, inequalities that are perpetuated when certain groups are systematically excluded, discriminated against and disempowered on the basis of defined economic, social, political, cultural, territorial, and other characteristics or shared identity such inequality becomes horizontal in nature..

According to Lustig (2017) in most cases, the processes of inequality and exclusion are sustained, reinforced and reproduced over time and space through political and social institutions (both formal and informal), economic structures and relations, legal frameworks, and behaviours that are embedded in (or reflect) prevailing political structures, power relations, and social and cultural attitudes and values (Bermeo, 2009; Stewart, 2010).

As documented in Oxfam report, inequalities between generations have grown at an alarming rate over the past few decades, paralleling the rise in the gap between rich and poor (Glassco and Holguin, 2016). Noticeably, youth are consistently over-represented among the unemployed and those that are largely experiencing uneven and unequal access to public services such as; health and education (OECD, 2014). In general, the social and economic inequalities in early life also increase the risk of lower earnings, lower standards of health and lower skills in adulthood. For instance, parents' degree of political involvement and level of education also influence the political participation of youth: in many occasions, parents pass on advantages such as political awareness, access to community and educational opportunities, and most importantly, support for their children's educational attainment (Flanagan and Levine, 2010). Democracy and inequality 1

In sum, for the purpose of this paper, inequality is define as the measurement of imbalance or unequal distribution in a system, which may be social, economic, political, diversity, gender, demographic and geographic among others. More precisely, inequality connotes the existence of unequal opportunities, unequal distribution of income, rewards, wealth and material goods within a group or society. By interpretation, the physical postures or composition of individuals is not major determinant of inequality in any case but distribution of and access to social, economic and political opportunities.

## **2.3. Poverty**

UNDP (1997a), in its Human Development Report has revealed that, over one billion people are living below one US per day, while another two billion are just merely better off. Undoubtedly, poverty pockets exist almost everywhere across the world without the exception of industrialised countries. However, most of the poor people in the world are living in the developing countries (Malati Pochun). It is also instructive to note that, human poverty has many dimensions, and it is not just poverty of income or not having things necessary for material well-being.

In practical sense, human poverty means the deprivation that people suffer throughout their lives: they do not enjoy the choices and opportunities which are most basic to human development and which make it possible to live a long, healthy, well-nourished and self-fulfilling life, to be educated and to have a reasonable standard of living, be able to live in freedom, self-respect, dignity and to participate in community

In another perspective, poverty can implies not having enough to feed and clothe oneself and family, not having access to quality education and health care, lack of access to land on which to grow one's needed food, unemployment, lack of access to credit facilities. Poverty could also connote vulnerability to insecurity and outbreak of communicable diseases, voiceless and exclusion from civil and political participation, susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

Many scholars have also defined poverty as; lack of multiple resources that lead to hunger and physical deprivation (Eze, 2009), "moneylessness" and "powerlessness" (Yakubu, 2010), levels of income that are inadequate for well-being (Network of Democracy Research Institutes, 2009) among others. In recent times as a result of complexity nature and depth of poverty pockets, attempts have been made to broaden the concept in order to capture its cross-cultural nature as classically demonstrated in the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in

1995: It was agreed that poverty has different manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illnesses; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion.

More importantly, poverty is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life... Meanwhile, [Mattes et al. \(2003\)](#) in their work, posited that, absolute or abject poverty is viewed as a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services.

According to World Bank, poverty is defined as a conspicuous deprivation in wellbeing which includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. The World Bank's "Voices of the Poor," based on research with over 20,000 poor people in 23 countries, identifies a range of factors which poor people identify as part of poverty. These include: Precarious livelihoods, excluded locations, physical limitations, gender relationships, problems in social relationships, lack of security, abuse by those in power, disempowered institutions, limited capabilities and weak community organizations ([Tetty, 2008](#)).

## **2.4. Institutional Reform**

It is important to note that, the Latin verb "reform" originally meant "to return to the former state" ([Ljubzhin, 2005](#)). In a traditional society, a reformer had to find the roots of changes that he has suggested, in the past experience. This was not so foolish taking into account that the consequences of institutional changes were too difficult to predict. Undoubtedly, discussions of institutional architecture as well as suggestions of its improvements are traditional in economic literature. However, Jan Tinbergen was probably the first scholar to considered Reform Design as a self- contained chapter of Economics in his fundamental book "On the Theory of Economic Policy", 1952, he laid down the foundations of the theory of planning as the best policy choice

Jan Tinbergen pointed out the importance of what we call now political constraints: "...sound policy has to satisfy certain principles set by or accepted by the majority of parliament..." Other important factors of successful policy implementation are social norms and "the whole complex of psychological factors known as "confidence" as well as "the costs of realization" which arise for example when a policy measure "hits a large number of people" (p. 75). Short Tinbergen's comments on obstacles to reform look quite up to date. He talked on uncertainty and lack of our knowledge, on psychological and cultural factors. "...we know very little about what a man does if private property is changed into public property..." ([Ljubzhin, 2005](#)).

In the current era of globalization, it is not a gainsaying to state that virtually all countries across the world have achieve development successes though in an uneven manner when compare with few decades ago. These successes have helped some countries to proffer solutions to the variety of institutional barriers that keep their people poor. This is true because institutional choices, and the way formal institutions function, are also a function of power relations and underlying structures of class and identity.

More historically, the grand convergence on institutional choices and functions has conceals some significant divergences and a set of unresolved questions. For instance it is not at all clear which institutional change challenges can be successfully confronted at which point in a country's development, and how and by whom such changes is to be carried out ([Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012](#); [North et al., 2009](#)). In the terms used by North et al. in their work, were unable to clearly stated the routes by which countries characterised by 'limited access orders' acquire the characteristics of 'open access orders'.

To Acemoglu and Robinson on the other hand, what historically have been the sequences through which 'extractive' economic and political structures have begun to give way to more 'inclusive' arrangements was very crucial? Following a quarter-century of post-Cold War liberal ascendancy, the multiplicity of routes by which today's economically advanced countries acquired their institutions ([Moore and Barrington, 1966](#); [Skocpol, 1979](#)) is beginning to get renewed attention ([Root, 2013](#)).

It is instructive to note that, more often than not institutions are broadly defined as strategy: they are the "rules of the game" that emerge from formal laws, informal norms and practices, and organizational structures in a given setting. The incentives they create shape the actions of public officials and determine the success or failure of a given nation. Unarguably, institutions often overlap with and often use interchangeably as organisations but institutions not synonymous with organizations; they are affected by policy design but are broader in scope and less subject to frequent change than most policy frameworks.

Undoubtedly, reform will proceed only when a country's leaders are committed to it and serve as motivating forces to change the internal rules and to ensure such changes are effectively enforce to achieve reform. Thus, for the changes in internal rules to be effectively enforced, government need to work with both local and foreign partners to understand and address the broad range of incentives and pressures both within and outside of government that affect public sector performance. Furthermore, there is no doubt that reforms must be supported and driven at the highest levels of government to be effective. However, only changing of internal rules of government is inadequate to promote ownership and develop sustainable reform.

More importantly, in order for institutional reform to be fully actualised three mechanisms that promote public sector effectiveness and good governance have been highlighted; first, internal rules and restraints: for example, internal accounting and auditing systems, independence of the judiciary and the central bank, civil service and budgeting rules, and rules governing ombudsmen and other internal watchdog bodies (that often report to



Parliaments); second, “Voice” and partnership: for example, decentralization/delegation to empower communities, service delivery surveys to solicit client feedback, and “notice and comment” regulatory rulemaking; and third, competition: for example, competitive social service delivery, private participation in infrastructure, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and privatization of certain market-driven activities. These may involve a fundamental rethinking of the role of the state, often a key component of reform

Many scholars have aimed at identifying general principles for institutional design that can be applied to a wide range of settings (Ostrom, 1990). Taking a clue from various disciplines, including anthropology and economics, they have identified key factors contributing to institutional performance, such as group size (Agrawal and Goyal, 2001), uncertainty of the resource (Wilson, 2002) or the level of monitoring (Ostrom and Nagendra, 2006). Under the foregoing approach, scholars have focused on the characteristics of the local Social-Ecological Systems (SESs), sometimes with reference to larger economic or political forces, but often lacked an in-depth analysis of the latter.

Noticeably, anthropologists have offered thick understandings of the cultural and historical determinants of institutional functioning (Cleaver, 2000; Mosse, 1997). Political ecologists have also enlarged the ‘contextual window’ in two respects: first by examining the role of socio-economic change and distant political forces in NRM (Robbins, 2004); second, by exploring the intricate relationship of discourses, power and institutions (Escobar, 1996; Hajer, 1995).

During all human history, people suggested and conducted reforms. In modern times, particularly in 20th century, reforms turned out to be the main form of institutional changes. The experience clearly demonstrated that the art of making reform is crucial for the success of economic development. However, a general theory of reform has developed very slowly, and only about 20 years ago, a jump took place in the number of works in this area. To accelerate the progress, one has to understand tendencies and difficulties. Moreover, this is important for understanding development of economics as a whole, since the new theory synthesizes

According to Alchian (1950), institutional reform and the changes that follows is often taken as a spontaneous process which takes place due to small stochastic disturbances and “natural selection” of the best variations. In the same vein, Douglass North stressed that, the “natural” institutional development including technical progress and change of prices. However, at the micro level, seemingly spontaneous movements are making by people; in every particular case, this is a concrete person or a group of them who seek to improve existing institutions. In actually sense, when the changes are conducted by governing bodies of economic or social units, a firm, a region or a country: such process is called “reforms”.

## **2.5. Insecurity**

Summarily, insecurity as a concept connotes everything unpleasant that poses threat to lives and peace of mankind. However, the use of insecurity as social concept also makes it vulnerable to different interpretations depending on the situation and individual involved. Simply put, the concept of insecurity has raised some fundamental questions such as; what are the factors that constituted danger or pose as threat to the total existence of human life; can people feel insecure for the same reason or different reason among other questions. Put differently, the condition of socio-political economic and other environmental factors surrounding individual and society at large can serve as predetermine indicators of insecurity. For instance, during the Cold War saga, security issue was purely considered from state centric perspective. Unsurprisingly, insecurity was conceived by Aodo and Ugwuoke (2014) as any act that poses threat to state interests in the international politics which explain part of the reasons for arms-race and proliferation of nuclear weapons for the purpose of self defence by the state. In the opinion of Beland (2005) insecurity is a state of fear or despair due to lack of access to the means of protection.

Notably, insecurity vividly represents the opposite of security. Thus, according to Ani (2010), security is the condition of being protected physically, emotionally, psychologically as well as from other harm, attack, terror which could be considered as non-desirable. Given the Ani’s definition of security, it is logical to say that, insecurity the existence of physical, emotional, psychological, harm attack, terror and other undesirable conditions constitutes the state of fear, restlessness, crisis and pressure.

Similarly, Aodo and Ugwuoke (2014), argued that, insecurity is a situation of fear or anything that causes fear, harm or has the capability to cause fear or harm to an individual. Such issues could be politico-strategic, socio-economic, or ecological in nature; for instance political instability, poverty, environmental degradation, lack of access to education, discrimination on the basis of gender, diseases and unemployment. In the same vein,

In the words of Achumba *et al.* (2013), insecurity is described from two major perspectives: the perspective of being vulnerable to hazard or risk of danger... and, the perspective of being open to threat or nervousness in anticipation of unforeseen trouble. Given the foregoing definition, one could rightly link insecurity to psychological or emotional state of being insecure.

## **2.6. Understanding why the Gross Inequality and Widespread of Poverty Persist**

More importantly, the persistence and the forces that create poverty and inequality also explain why it would be difficult to eradicate world inequality and to make poor people prosperous. As pointed out by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), society’s choice of political and economic institutions which could either be inclusive that encourage economic growth or extractive that create obstacles for economic growth. In most cases, countries level of poverty and inequality increases when there is existence of extractive economic institutions supported by extractive political institutions that impede socio-economic and political development.

Undoubtedly, the foregoing suggests a strong synergy between economic and political institutions. The more a country’s political institutions is becoming more and more extractive, the more power is concentrating in the hand of

few elite with limited constraints on how such power is exercised. In this sense, economic institutions are often structured by the elite to extract resources from the rest of the society. In sum, extractive economic institutions must inherently depend on extractive political institutions for each other survival and to keep the masses in perpetual poverty, uproot the economic institutions that appropriate resources of the many, erect entry barrier and suppress the functioning of market forces so that only a few privilege can benefits.

Despite of complexity of the world inequality and depth of the challenge created by widespread of poverty particularly in developing countries, the powerful and the rest of society are always in disagreement about which set of rules and institutions should remain in place and which ones should be changed to improve societal wellbeing. In essence, what rules society adopts is often determined by political interplay: in simple terms, which has the power and how this power is exercise determine the level of poverty and inequality in any given situation.

For instance, in 2010, it was revealed that only 388 people owned as much of world's wealth as 50% of world poorest population; by 2015 this number had fallen to 80, and by 2017 it was further reduced to 8 [Oxfam \(2017\)](#). This concentration of wealth, which has been likened to 'the greatest reshuffle of individual income since the Industrial Revolution' ([Milanovic, 2016](#)), might even be underestimated because of assets hidden offshore ([Shaxson et al., 2012](#)).

It is instructive to note that, economic growth that can help in reducing poverty and inequality is not a process of more and better technology and more and better educated people alone, but also a transformative and destabilizing process associated with widespread creative destruction: growth thus progress only if not blocked by the economic losers who anticipate that their economic privileges will be lost and by the political losers who fear that their political power will be eroded. Put differently, in Nigeria, poverty has continued to multiply and inequality is widening on daily basis without any hope of succour. This is true, because in many cases both economic and political growth that can move million of people away from poverty and reduce inequality have been blocked by the powerful.

For instance, in Nigeria, many public enterprises have been exploited and sabotaged by political elite to favour themselves and few privileges: the railway transportation that was considered as the cheapest, the most effective in terms of economic benefits and safety, at a point was sabotaged and render into the state of moribund in order to favour powerful private transporters and haulage businesses. Similarly, the power sector (electricity) was also sabotage to pave way for importation of both residential and industrial power generating machine by some kiths, kin and cronies of the powerful political leaders. The story is the same with local refineries which were cynically run down in favour of importation of processed oil and petroleum by the few privileged and powerful people. However, every governmental effort to revisit and reposition the above vital economic sectors have been blocked by the same set of beneficiary of the institutional failure either as a result of fear that their economic privileges will be lost or that their political power will be eroded.

There are ongoing debates about how much of inequality is appropriate or even desirable within a society, for example to maintain an incentive structure and to recognize different levels of talent and effort. However, the chasm between rich and poor in some countries has become so wide that there is now consensus across the board that persisting inequality represents a structural and institutional risk to the deepening and resilience of democracy. This concern is now even evident among international financial institutions such as the [World Bank \(2016\)](#) and the International Monetary Fund ([Lagarde, 2014](#)), which for a long time tended to prioritize the promotion of growth through structural adjustment, under the assumption that such growth would trickle down and help to combat poverty, while inequality itself rarely registered as a problem.

The inevitability of inequality has been echoed by many scholars due to globalisation pressure, as observed by [Atkinson \(2015\)](#), there is a consensus that multiple factors contribute to increasing income inequality and that those factors are difficult to disentangle. There is also agreement that structural and economic trends exacerbate economic inequality. This is explain by skill-based technological change in which machine tools, computers, and robots operated by high-skilled workers replace or forced low-skilled workers out of their jobs; international trade and domestic outsourcing in which lower-paid workers are substituted for better-paid ones; and winner-take-all markets in which the most successful, not only in athletics and entertainment but also in the corporate and financial sectors, are able to command stratospheric compensation.

The conventional wisdom that can be deduce from the foregoing expositions is that, inequality and poverty are conjoin twin that reinforce each other and as much as Nigeria continue to dwell in extractive economic and political institutions, there will continue to be low level of educational output, because economic institutions have failed to create incentives for the poor to be educated and political institutions also has failed to induce the government to build, finance, and support schools that meet the aspirations of the poor. The implications of this failure on Nigerian people and democracy are numerous: the country would lack inclusive markets as a result of its inability to mobilise some of the potential talents who are now working as uneducated farmers, street urchins, forcefully drafted into the military, engaging in cyber fraud and crimes due to lack of opportunity to actualise their vocation in life.

However, a cursory note must be made that if the foregoing situation remains unabated, the aspirations of the rich might be eventually truncated by the agitations and frustrations of the poor with overall negative consequences on peace, security, development and democracy in Nigeria.

## **2.7. Can Democracy Cure Gross Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria vis-à-vis Can Gross Inequality and Poverty kill Democracy in Nigeria?**

Historically, there is no evident that democracy can eradicate inequality and poverty whether in developed or developing countries, although, there is possibility that if it is well managed, it has the potential to reduce them.

However, what is more certain is the devastating consequence that unabated inequality and widespread of poverty can generate against the survivability and viability of democracy across the world. Against the backdrop of the possibility that democracy to reduce level of poverty and inequality, many, scholars have argued that a democratic political regime has long been regarded as an attribute of high-income and industrialized economies (Diamond, 1992; Lipset, 1960).

Whereas, new scholarship have countered Lipset's law by arguing that "third wave" democracies have been installed in both rich and poor countries which shows that democracy is not necessarily a sole attribute of high income and industrialized economies (Collier, 1999; Doorenspleet, 2005; Huntington, 1991; Przeworski *et al.*, 2000). There is an overwhelming concern among the world leaders and scholars that poverty and economic inequality pose a great threat to the quality and even survival of democracy and this has assumed new urgency in recent years (Plattner, 2012). More often than not, the foregoing has result in lack of development and inability to reduce poverty in many developing countries and pose a serious threat to democracies around the world.

According to Thandika Mkandawire (2006), most of the recent discontent with new democracies and its consolidation process have been traced to their institutional weakness such as presidentialism that concentrate most of the power in the hand of president, lack of horizontal accountability, and the persistence of "authoritarian enclaves" that often hold democracies at ransom. As further stressed by Mkandawire, this has result into blackwash of new democracies such as "low-intensity democracies", "exclusionary democracies", "démocratie tropicalisé", "delegative democracy" and "low-intensity citizenship". However, in many occasions, the foregoing blackwashes also point to discontent on the substantive issues of equity and material well-being among the people.

As pointed out by UNDP (2002), some 20 years later, democracy has not produced dividends in the lives of ordinary people in many countries and it is even worse in developing countries: income inequality and poverty have risen sharply in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, sometimes at unprecedented rates...and poverty has continued to ravage most of democratic states in Africa. Similarly, many newly democratic regimes in Latin America seem no better equipped to tackle the region's high poverty and inequality than their authoritarian predecessors.

In opinion of Thandika Mkandawire (2006), democracy per se does not eliminate poverty. Rather, it is the development strategies adopted that does: with the evident that some of the best performers in terms of eradication of poverty have been authoritarian countries pursuing developmentalist and socially inclusive policies, while some democracies have been among the worst performers (such as India, Botswana, the Philippines and Venezuela). According to Mkandawire, the best performers among the democracies do not compare with the Republic of Korea, Taiwan Province of China and Singapore where the percentage of population below the poverty line is zero.

He further argued that many new democracies are architect of their own failings in terms of poverty and inequality reduction: many of the new democracies are pursuing policies that are unlikely to address the problems of poverty. That even in developing countries where there is abject poverty, the legitimacy of democracy cannot rest only on its procedures; rather the legitimate of democracy must rest on their performance as well how the fight against poverty is pursued. The forgoing is corroborated by Eskin (1994), democracy implies acceptance of the basic equality of men as human and basic responsibility of all adult men and women for their own destiny. He further maintain that there cannot be a genuine democracy in a country where citizen are grossly unequal in wealth and the poor who are inevitably the majority are dependent on the wealthy.

As argued by White (1998), the capacity of democratic regimes to secure and sustained equitable socioeconomic development depends heavily on the extent to which they can construct effective developmental states. From time to time democracies will have to respond to the challenge of the "full belly thesis", which claims that democracy was a luxury the poor cannot afford and gave precedence to the "right to development" over all other rights.

In Nigeria, democracy has almost becoming synonymous with corruption and breeding of corrupt political elite which in return led to widespread of poverty and gross inequality. By and large, the role of corruption in determines the level of poverty and corruption cannot be over-emphasized in Nigeria. According to Badmus (2017) the phenomenon of corruption is believed to be the major cause of several socio-economic and political misfortunes that has ravage Nigeria since the First Republic. Nigeria with 184,201,962 people that accounts for 47% of the West Africa population (World Bank, 2015), with enormous human and natural resources falls among countries with extreme poverty with over 70% of her people live on \$1.25 or even lesser per day.

More important, the phenomenon of corruption has destructively ravaged Nigeria as a nation, paralysed developmental nerves and destroyed most of the things which Nigerians held and cherished as national values. Although, as Chetwynd (2003) argued, corruption in itself does not produce poverty or inequality, but it has direct consequences on the economy and governance factors which in turns produces poverty. Chetwynd and his colleagues further maintained that corruption aggravates income inequality by creating permanent economic distortions which gives more opportunities to some people than others. The distributional consequences that corruption generates are grave as it aggravates income inequality and ensures that lower households pay a higher part of their income as bribes. Pathetically, the poor are often pushed to live in degraded environments with fewer public services and amenities, poor access to public transport, educational opportunities and jobs. Thus, result in higher rates of crime and anti-social behaviour which in turn reinforces poverty and inequality (Victoria, 2016).

Unfortunately, there is persistent dwindling in the level of public trust on democratic system, political elite, government and public institutions' performance in delivering quality and affordable services to the citizens in developing countries like Nigeria: it was generally observed that politicians and bureaucrats often show greater interests in rent-seeking activities than ameliorating the suffering of the masses. The impacts of rent-seeking activities of the governing elite supported by the nature of democracy in Nigeria have become serious source of insecurity in Nigeria: negative impacts of abject poverty and gross inequality has inspired rise involvement of

unemployed youths in many crimes activities such as; armed robbery, human/drug trafficking, kidnapping, cyber frauds, terrorism, youth militancy, cultism and growing trends of public discontent with government and its institutions in Nigeria.

### 3. Conclusion

In understanding the depth of inequality and poverty with its untold implications for security and level of public discontent with government and its institutions in Nigeria, it is imperative to know how democracy has performed either to undermine public institutions by ensuring that extractive political and economic institutions flourish or how democracy has foster effective public institutions through the establishment of inclusive political and economic institutions. However, democracy in Nigeria has tainted toward the former rather than the latter: though democracy has promise freedom and right to private property, but in Nigeria, democracy did take into account the incompatibility of freedom and poverty neither did it consider that freedom is meaningless to the politically oppressed and economically exploited masses that would invariably constitute a big great threat to security of private property, democratic consolidation and national peace at large.

Thus, democracy can hardly survived in a society where people are grossly unequal and poverty is rising in an alarming rate. More often than not, in such situation as we have in Nigeria, there is high tendency that agitations of the poor masses would eventually truncate the aspirations of the few rich and in the end both democracy and national security would be at high risk. Hence, for democracy to survive, it must strive to balance aspirations of the rich with agitations of the poor in order for freedom to become meaningful to the poor, for private property to become more secured and for democracy to be consolidated in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

- It is important to note that, for any country to achieve prosperity and build mutual trust between the citizens and the government; such country must address the fundamental political problems. In other words, the country must analyse and find solution to how politics has affected the performance of democracy, and how various governmental policies, competition for and wielding of political power affect economic institutions' performance, and how incentive and national wealth is distributed.
- Notably, for Nigeria to address the pervasive tension generated by rising inequality and abject poverty that is currently ravaging the country, the government must fully embrace inclusive economic institutions: the system must sincerely allow and encourage mass participation of citizens in economic activities through provision of incentives and removal of entry barriers. This would allow a greater number of people to make the best use of their skills and knowledge. The foregoing could also be enhanced by ensuring that private property is well secured, ensure unbiased rule of law, and provision of public services that provides an equal opportunity for citizens.
- Similarly, government must ensure it made both quality education and modern technology that is now consider as dual engine of development accessible to its citizens in order to bridge the inequality between the rich and the poor, and also to reduce poverty level in the country. The accessibility of citizens to education and technology is presumed on the fact that, such opportunity would help to sustain economic growth through improved technologies, citizens would also become more productive and such will improve their living standards.
- In sum, the context and content of democracy in Nigeria must be revisited: this is important in order to insulate our democracy against democracy exploiters that would manipulate democracy for their personal benefits against general/public interests. This could be achieved through the people, first, by ensuring they use their vote to make radical change in political leadership and to ensure they voted for genuine democrats that would ensure institutional reforms, social justice, fairness in the distribution of national resources and re-entrenchment of middle class that has long disappeared in Nigerian social economic status.

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