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## EXPENSIVE DEMOCRATIC POLITICS AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: A COMPARISON WITH CHINA

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### ABSTRACT

In the democratic family of nations, Nigeria is reputed to host one of the most expensive democratic political systems. The Nigerian democratic system has become a new minting causeway producing nouveaux riches, political jobbers and a tiny political aristocracy who control the vast resources and opportunities in the state. In the midst of this megalomaniac plutocracy, a distended army of the Nigerian unemployed is palpable. This precariat class is a victim of a democratic system that seems to legislate wealth avenues for a minority while pauperising the majority. On the other hand, while China's democratic system has earned epithets such as "pseudo democracy", "flawed democracy" or socialist or communist democracy, the country is a modern example of an economic phoenix. Within 30 years, China rose from a dark silhouette as one of the poorest agricultural countries in the world to its second-largest economy status, lifting six hundred and fifty million of its citizens out of grinding poverty, about 80% of the entire world's bottom billion. The Chinese economic model and particularly its positive and unconditional friendship to African nations have stood out. While its democratic model provides an alternative to the Western-chiselled liberal democratic orthodoxy, its approach to governance with zero tolerance for corruption and its lean political structure may become a learning point for Nigeria and its African kindred nations. This study aims to examine the scale of Nigeria's expensive democratic politics, and investigate its impact on the festering unemployment situation in the country vis-à-vis the Chinese democratic model and its cost of governance. Lessons drawn from this analysis and using the Marxist and Deprivation theories are expected to compel the present political class in Nigeria to overturn its natural shenanigans for responsible and benign leadership, which has the potential of reversing the unemployment dead weight in Nigeria.

Keywords: Expensive Democratic Politics in Nigeria, Chinese Democratic Model, Precariat, Unemployment, Responsible and Benign Leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

Democracy has continued to enjoy global acceptance because of its vaunted benefits and the freedoms that it guarantees the human society. No other form of government has attracted much cachet like it has done in most countries of the world. With the decline of the Cold War, the unipolarity of global politics favouring the West, led by the United States of America, and the gradual ascendancy of the liberal orthodoxy (typified by free market economics and liberal political ideologies), democracy has debouched as what Jamo (2013) perceives as a final human government. This triumphalism may also be located in the arguments that democracy stimulates development (Jamo, 2009, 2013), and “fosters the rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of the press, transparent and periodic electoral process, majority rule and minority rights”, among others (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012a, p. 72). In effect, democracy has been seen as the only form of government capable of fully satisfying international covenants on civil and political rights because it is a rule by laws and not by individuals (EOD, 2010 in Imhonopi & Urim, 2012a).

It was therefore with a triumphal posture that the Nigerian people embraced the return to democracy in Nigeria in May 1999, with the hope that their time-honoured quest for national transformation would be met in no time. However, after more than 16 years of unbroken interregnum of democratic politics in Nigeria since 1999, the performance scorecard of democratic governance raises questions that border on its sustainability in the country. For example, instead of rewriting the ugly development narrative in the country, democratic politics in Nigeria has turned into a farcical vaudeville that benefits the autochthonous aristocracy and plutonomic elements in the country and their international allies. Also, rather than snooker the slide into national dismemberment, infrastructural crisis and human capital underdevelopment, and widen the sociopolitical and economic spaces, democratic politics in Nigeria has succeeded in underpinning a climate of iron oligarchy, plutocracy, official corruption, subjugation of popular wishes, politicisation of ethnic diversity, and the entrenchment of an expensive governance project that benefits only minoritarian interests (Imhonopi & Urim, 2011, 2012b).

Consequently, Nigeria as the fourth largest democracy with a population gradually inching towards 190 million people and the world’s sixth largest oil-rich country is suffering from a governance

crisis that has convulsed its development trajectory and hampered its human development indices (Imhonopi & Urim, 2013; Jamo, 2013; Worldometers, 2016). Particularly, the present high unemployment albatross remains a national blight further swelling the population of citizens in the precarity trap. Thus, the precaritisation of the socioeconomic conditions of many Nigerians makes them susceptible to anarchic and neo-fascist vision or crazed evangelical message (Standing, 2012) or to insurrectionary or reactionary interests in the state having the potential of morphing them into death angels in the society (Imhonopi & Urim, 2015).

On the other hand, the Chinese political model or democratic system which some have waved aside as “flawed” or “pseudo” or social democracy has delivered great social and economic dividends for and to the Chinese people. Although a litany of criticisms trails the Chinese governance model, it nonetheless has adroitly lifted six hundred and fifty million of its citizens out of oppressive poverty, and brought China into the league of industrialised nations (“Is American democracy”, 2015). This has been achieved with what seems to be an autochthonous Chinese political model which underprops a system of political meritocracy and village or community democracy.

In this study, the objectives are to (1) examine the scale of Nigeria’s expensive democratic politics, (2) investigate how Nigeria’s expensive democratic politics has impacted on the festering unemployment situation in the country, (3) compare Nigeria’s expensive democratic practice with the Chinese political model, and (4) recommend how the negative consequences of expensive democratic politics could be reversed in order to check the present unemployment dead weight in Nigeria with lessons drawn from the home-grown Chinese political model.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This study has adopted a qualitative approach with heavy reliance on secondary data drawn from books, journals, magazines and other credible publications.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Conceptualisation of terms

#### *Democracy*

Democracy is a system of government that makes the people the focal point of governance (Obianyo, 2008). It has been described as a governance process that promotes the doctrine of equalitarianism, meaning that all men are equal and there is absence of any special privilege (Laski, 1982). It has also been seen as a republic of equals (Gamble, 1981) or a state comprising political equals (Dahl, 1971). Democracy is known to provide and guarantee the rule of law, constitutionalism, human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and many other rights that support human liberty (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Prah, 2007; Urim & Imhonopi, 2013). It generally denotes the opportunity for citizens to partake in decision making in the political process (Ake, 1991; Oke, 2005).

#### *Nigerian democratic politics*

This study borrows from the ideological triplicate of Ajayi and Ojo (2014) in describing Nigerian democratic politics which they see as (1) a spendthrift system in which the country's brand of democracy spends so much to accomplish so little; (2) a brand of democracy that reveres officialdom, invests and secures the power holders while disparaging the people who are the true bearers of political legitimacy, and (3) a brand of democracy that is plagued by a "hydra-headed and pathological corruption" (p. 107) reducing the impact any apparent good policy could have had on the polity. Therefore, Nigerian democratic politics could be said to be elitist, prebendal, plutonomic, bourgeois and expensive in nature.

#### *Unemployment*

Unemployment has been seen as a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment (Fajana, 2000). It occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the unemployed are people without work, people currently available for work or people seeking work whether in paid employment or self-employment (ILO, 1982). Unemployment is often used as a measure of the health of an economy. It is a macroeconomic problem which responsible governments monitor and regulate, signifying that the higher the unemployment rate in the economy, the higher the poverty level and associated welfare challenges,

and the lower the unemployment rate, the lower the poverty level and associated welfare challenges in the society. Anyadike, Emeh and Ukah (2012) have identified the following as types of unemployment in the labour market:

**Structural unemployment** takes place when there is a change in the structure of an industry or the economic activities of the country due to change in consumer taste, and technological applications. It happens frequently in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. **Frictional unemployment** results from industrial friction in which jobs may exist, yet workers may be unable to fill them either because they do not possess the necessary skill, or because they are not aware of their existence. **Seasonal unemployment** occurs as a result of seasonal changes in the activities of particular industries caused by climatic changes, changes in fashions or by the inherent nature of such industries. **Cyclical unemployment** is a demand-deficient unemployment meaning that aggregate demand falls below the full employment level, making it insufficient to purchase the full employment level of output. **Residual unemployment** is caused by personal factors such as old age, physical or mental disability, poor work attitudes and inadequate training. Lastly, **Technological unemployment** is an outcome of changes in the techniques of production or increasing mechanisation of the production process.

These types of unemployment result in willing and capable people not finding decent paid employment.

### *Precariat*

The “Precariat” is a portmanteau word consisting of the adjective *precarious* and noun *proletariat*; the latter word being a description for working-class people as a social group. Proletariat has its origins in Latin *proletarius*, which describes a person who has no wealth in property and whose only way of serving the state was by producing offspring that would work for the good of society and who sell their labour to live. According to Imhonopi and Urim (2015), the precariat describes a social group consisting of people whose lives are difficult because they have little or no job security and few employment rights. Standing (2012) describes the precariat as an agglomerate of insecure people, who live in bits and pieces, are in and out of short-term jobs, have no narrative of occupational development, and include millions of frustrated educated youth who do not like

existing socioeconomic conditions before them, millions of women abused in oppressive labour, growing numbers of criminalised tagged for life, millions being categorised as ‘disabled’ and migrants in their hundreds of millions around the world. The precariat, therefore, are people suffering from a combination of insecurities such as labour market insecurity, employment insecurity, job insecurity, work insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, income insecurity and representation insecurity (Standing, 2013).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The Marxist and Deprivation Theories have been used to discuss this study.

### **Marxist Theory**

Karl Marx is the progenitor of this theory which locates society within two disparate binaries: the rich and the poor; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; the dominant class and the dominated classes, among others. According to Karl Marx, the history of hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle. The class struggle is between those who manage the means of production or economic resources (that is, the dominant class) and those whose only bargaining chip is their labour (the dominated classes). Marx also believed that the state was not an unbiased umpire but an instrument for the promotion, perpetuation and protection of the primordial interests of the dominant class. Thus, the state is a reflection of the interests and desires of the dominant class while the dominated classes serve the interests of the dominant class within the state. Therefore, in analysing democratic politics in Nigeria, it appears that the Marxist ideology has been proved right as the dominant class, which also is the political class, has created an expensive democratic system that has constricted the political space, promoting and sustaining the interests of an oligarchy. This same class has legislated wealth avenues for a minority while throwing the majority by their actions and inactions into the precarity trap characterised by marginalisation and pauperisation. By creating various black holes to expropriate resources from the commonwealth, funds that would have been used for the development of the society, including the creation or stimulation of employment opportunities and for advancing the cause of the downtrodden, marginalised masses, the dominant class have become the key culprits of a morally bankrupt and unscrupulous hawkish system that runs a democratic politics that exists for itself, by itself and of itself. Marx therefore proposes a classless society as the therapy for solving this kind of

Mephistophelian system in order to recreate an economic system authored and managed by the dominated classes (Imhonopi, Onifade & Urim, 2013). While the influence of the Marxist ideology might have waned considerably over the years, its use in academic analysis continues to remain socially, politically and economically relevant.

### **Relative Deprivation Theory**

According to Morrison (1978), the relative deprivation theory holds that social (and even violent) movements are rooted among people who feel deprived of some good(s) or resource(s) they feel they are entitled to. Thus, it is an experience of being deprived of something one believes one is entitled to and creates a discontent in people when they compare their positions to others and realise that they have less of what they believe themselves to be entitled than those around them, leading them to violence or to display some anti-social behaviour (Boundless, 2015). For example, basic education up to secondary school is the right of every Nigerian child but if for economic or other extraneous reasons, a Nigerian child is unable to acquire this basic education, which has the potential of increasing his or her employability or enabling him or her acquire financially viable or technical skills, that individual could nurture feelings of deprivation, anger and disenchantment towards the society and could explore ways to take his or her pound of flesh. Similarly, individuals engage in deviant behaviours when their means do not match their goals. However, feelings of deprivation are relative, as they come from a comparison to social norms that are not absolute and usually differ from time and place. Critics of this theory have pointed out that it fails to explain why some people who feel discontent fail to take action and join social movements or to display anti-social behaviours.

It is the authors' view that there is a connexion between these theories. The Marxist approach describes a rapacious dominant class desperate to maintain a vice-like grip on the society by controlling the means of production, the political superstructure and other resources and assets of the state. This class runs an exclusionary agenda which benefits and enriches those belonging to its class or apparatchiks, while the masses are allowed to languish in poverty and neglect. By denying the masses such securities as employment security, income security and social security, this deprivation leads to frustration and could further fester into social movements or anti-social behaviours against the state and its representatives. This is why the growing unemployment

situation in Nigeria is a tinderbox that must be addressed before it explodes into intractable crises that may threaten the very fabrics of Nigeria's statehood.

## **EXPENSIVE DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA**

Literature is replete with studies, findings and writings that support the standpoint that democratic politics is obscenely expensive in Nigeria (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014; Imhonopi & Urim, 2012b; Jamo, 2013; Nwakanma, 2014; Umosen, 2015). Democratic politics has remained scandalous in the expensive management of the democratic structures of the state and the people that run them. As Imhonopi and Urim (2012) aver, democratic politics in Nigeria is characterised by entrenched byzantine corruption at the centre down to the constituent states and local authorities. This is further worsened by the multiplication of government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), a bloated, non-performing and compromised civil service, kleptomaniacal compensation packages for the executive and legislative branches, and a litany of abandoned projects and infrastructural crises owing to the mismanagement of state funds.

This view was captured by Adeseko (2015) who observed that the different democratic structures in the country such as the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government were typified by money politics, blackmail and financial shenanigans. Closely tied to this is the cost of democratic elections. It is not that all over the world elections are cheap democratic activities (Champion News, 2014), but the way the political class goes about it in Nigeria is desperate, usurious and even violent. Not only do incumbents and those who have access to the economic resources of the state dip their hands into the common vault to sponsor their preferred candidates, but they also ensure that such candidates are compelled to do their bidding when they achieve electoral success. Rather than serve the people who purportedly elected these officials into government, the political godsons serve the interests and needs of their godfathers before the interests of the masses. This has led to the rise of political godfatherism with all its ills and desperation in Nigerian politics.

Also, electoral politics in Nigeria seems to favour the highest bidder, that is, those with deep pockets or political entrepreneurs who venture into politics to be serviced instead of serving the people (Daniel, 2015; Lawal, 2015). Thus, political participation in Nigeria appears to favour the

aristocracy, the plutonomy or the dominant class, thus reflecting or re-echoing the Marxian thesis which avows that those who dominate the economic space are the same ones who dominate other spheres of social life including politics.

Furthermore, the cost of governance has been egregious raising the concern that the duplication of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the state need to be reversed to safeguard not only the present financial health of Nigeria but to preserve its posterity. The body language of the Nigerian people must have been well read by the former President Goodluck Jonathan and the Chair of its Presidential Advisory Committee, Lt. Gen. Theophilus Danjuma (rtd) who advised the Goodluck Jonathan administration to work towards reducing the number of MDAs in the country since some of these MDAs were a duplication of the functions of the others (ThisDay, 2011). The Buhari Administration has been working hard to reduce the number of MDAs and ministers in the country. From 24 ministries and 42 ministers in the former government of President Goodluck Jonathan, the new government has shown its determination to prune down the number of ministers in his cabinet when he sent the names of 36 ministerial nominees to the Senate (Nda-Isaiah, 2015).

According to Ajayi and Ojo (2014), Nigerian democracy is also highlighted by a “mind boggling and unpardonable waste of public funds on the comfort of a few Nigerians” (p. 110). This “democracy of waste”, as Ajayi and Ojo call it, first and foremost, invests in the comfort and security of elected officials rather than in the mass of citizens (Imhonopi, Urim, & Kasumu, 2014). The tables below show the allocation to the National Assembly in 2015 which is an eloquent testimony to the waste of public funds.

**Table 1: What Nigerian Lawmakers will Earn in 2015 According to the 2015 Budget**

<b>WHAT LAWMAKERS WILL EARN IN 2015</b>	
<i>Number of Legislators in the National Assembly</i>	
<b>Total Annual Allowances</b>	<b>= N7.79 Billion</b>
Senators	Members of the House of Representatives
109 Senators	360 HoR Members
<b><i>Total Annual Allowances = N7.79 Billion Broken Down As Follows:</i></b>	
Senators	Members of the House of Representatives
N1.92 billion annually	N5.87 billion annually
<b><i>Overall Annual Legislators' Take Home Allowances and Salaries</i></b>	

<b>= N8.72 Billion Broken Down As:</b>	
Senators	Members of the House of Representatives
N2.14 billion	N6.58 billion
<b>Allowances As % Of Salary Shown Below:</b>	
Senators	Members of the House of Representatives
870%	820%
<b>Total Take Home for Each Member of the National Assembly</b>	
N19.66 million/Senator	N18.26 million/ Member HoR

Source: Olufemi and Akinwumi (2015)

**Table 2: Proportion of Legislators' Allowances as a Ratio of their Basic Salaries**

<b>Proportion of Senators Allowance as a ratio of their Basic Salaries</b>	
Motor Vehicle Loan	250%
Furniture	150%
Accommodation	150%
Constituency Allowance	125%
Domestic Staff	50%
Motor Vehicle Fuelling/Maintenance	50%
Robe Allowance	25%
Utilities	25%
Personal Assistant	25%
Newspaper/Periodicals	10%
Recess Allowance	10%
<b>Proportion of Senators Allowance as a ratio of their Basic Salaries</b>	
Motor Vehicle Loan	250%
Furniture	150%
Accommodation	150%
Constituency Allowance	75%
Domestic Staff	50%
Motor Vehicle Fuelling/Maintenance	50%
Robe Allowance	25%
Utilities	25%
Personal Assistant	25%
Newspaper/Periodicals	10%
Recess Allowance	10%

Source: Olufemi and Akinwumi (2015)

Cumulatively, the country spends N8.72 billion every year in salaries and allowances to give its lawmakers a luxurious lifestyle that legislators in developed climes only have in their dreams. Meanwhile, as Olufemi and Akinwumi (2015) further observe, the amount the Senators and Members of the House of Representatives remit as tax is insignificant as their income tax is calculated as a function of their basic salaries alone. Apart from this humongous pay, there are still hefty quarterly allowances lawmakers pay themselves under the rubric “Office running cost”. According to Olufemi and Akinwumi (2015), these allowances which they consider “illegal” was

N192 million per senator per quarter while their counterparts in the House of Representatives received N140 million per quarter. Olufemi and Akinwumi opine that these allowances have increased dramatically over time.

Another report shows that the N150 billion budgeted for the National Assembly in 2015 could actually fund capital projects for 20 MDAs. The Table below has captured the information.

**Table 3: Budget 2015: National Assembly's N150 Billion Enough to Fund Capital Projects for 19 MDAs**

S/N	Budget Allocation to the National Assembly	N150 billion
1	Police Affairs	N150 million (0.1%)
2	Youth Development	N1.138 billion (0.75%)
3	Police Formation and Commands	N17 billion (11.33%)
4	Women Affairs	N1.25 billion (0.83%)
5	Agricultural and Rural Development	N7 billion (4.63%)
6	Water Resources	N6 billion (4.0%)
7	Defence/MOD/Army/Air Force/Navy	N35 billion (23.33%)
8	Education	N20 billion (13.33%)
9	Works	N11 billion (7.5%)
10	Labour and Productivity	N20 billion (13.3%)
11	Science and Technology	N500 million (0.3%)
12	Power	N4.24 billion (2.82%)
13	Communication Technology	N500 million (0.3%)
14	Justice	N500 million (0.3%)
15	Petroleum Resources	N500 million (0.3%)
16	Environment	N500 million (0.3%)
17	Health	N20 billion (13.33%)
18	Lands and Housing	N500 million (0.3%)
19	Transport	N4 billion (2.64%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>N149.8 billion</b>

**Source:** Olufemi, Isine, and Akinwumi (2015)

From Table 3, it is evident that the budget to the National Assembly can fund 19 ministries, departments and agencies including the Ministries of Education, Police Affairs, Power, Agricultural and Rural Development, Defence, Justice and others. In the twilight of the Seventh Assembly, the clamour by Nigerian civil society organisations only forced the Senator David Mark-led Assembly to reduce this annual budget of N150 billion to N130 billion (Isine, 2015). But whether this was implemented or followed through is another matter.

The executive arm is not immune from this unwarranted and degenerate profligacy. An example was the waste of public funds to give comfort to former President Goodluck Jonathan. A report stated that N176 million was spent on the extension of the gates of Aso Rock Villa (the official residence of the President), ₦280 million was allocated to the purchase of two bullet proof vehicles in the President's fleet of cars, ₦36 million was allocated to the extension of power supply to the State House Centre Store, ₦52.4 million was spent providing uninterruptible power supply to the Presidential Guest House, ₦127.5 million was allocated to the overhauling of two generating sets in the Presidential Lodge, ₦512.54 million was provided for the renovation and refurbishing of the family wing of the President's main residence, ₦101.67 million was spent on the rehabilitation of the transformer sub-station in the Villa, and ₦97.95 million was allocated to the extension of the Villa's car parks, totalling the sum of ₦1.5 billion spent on different kinds of upgrades and renovations in and around the President's residence (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014). If this is happening at the centre, one wonders what would be happening in the constituent units where state governors as Chief Executives have the unchallenged powers to do as they please. Most of the unicameral state assemblies are rubber stamps or an appendage or extension of the executive arm. Then, at the federal and state levels, ministers and commissioners also run their own signature cabarets of luxury, impunity and prodigality.

Nigeria also has one of the largest Presidential Air Fleets (PAF) in the world with ten airplanes while Ghana and Algeria each has only one aircraft in their Presidential Air Fleets and Japan and the Netherlands each has two (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014). This is in addition to the cost of foreign travels, local trips, maintenance of the presidential fleet, medical expenses, food, and others, in all amounting to ₦33 billion (about \$190m) in 2014 whereas all Nigerian federal roads, most of which are accident-prone because of utter lack of maintenance, got a paltry allocation of ₦100bn (about \$575m) in 2014 (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014) while the entire Ministry of Works got N11 billion in 2015 (Olufemi, et al., 2015).

The egregiousness and malevolence with which public funds are used by a minority elected to represent the majority is quite befuddling. This elicited a caution from Alhaji Balarabe Musa, former Governor of old Kaduna State who, in response to the N9 billion wardrobe allowance given to the 109 senators and 360 representatives in 2015, said that it was the same obscene allowances

allocated to legislators, among other factors, that led to the collapse of the Second Republic under the leadership of former President Shehu Shagari (Umosen, 2015).

Commenting on the sleazy pay allocated by the National Assembly to its members, Umosen (2015, para. 7) described it as implying that Nigeria is under a siege and that it is a “development suggesting of a farce, featuring over-pampered children bristling in anticipation of prized toys for a festive season”. A report by the Economist of London suggested that federal legislators in Nigeria, with a basic salary of \$189,500 per annum (N30.6m), were the highest paid law-makers in the world. Quoting from the International Monetary Fund and independently generated data, the study compared the lawmakers’ basic salary to a ratio of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person across countries of the world. According to the report, the basic salary (which excludes allowances) of a Nigerian lawmaker, is 116 times the country’s GDP per person of \$1,600 (Umosen, 2015). The \$189,500 earned annually by each Nigerian legislator, IMF said, is estimated to be 52 per cent higher than what Kenyan legislators, who are the second highest paid lawmakers, earned.

Thus, the democratic system in Nigeria has been perfected as a conduit pipe for perpetrating all forms of kleptocracy and self-styled perpetuation of the dominant class’ economic interests in the country. This omnivorous class sees the commonwealth as perquisites of their office and the people as tribute payers. Other areas that describe Nigeria’s expensive democratic system as identified by Imhonopi and Urim (2012b) include but is not limited to the monthly security vote which has failed to secure the citizens of the country from internal and external aggressors; legislators’ jumbo pay packets, expensive electioneering process, corruption of public office holders, over-inflation of contracts, duplication of aides and advisers of/to elected officials, duplication and multiplication of government ministries, departments and agencies and an entrenched culture of graft and bribery which has scandalised government business in all its entirety.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE UNEMPLOYMENT DEAD WEIGHT IN NIGERIA**

Unemployment in Nigeria has become a national dead weight that requires government’s commitment and sincere intervention. Decades of mismanagement of public funds and entrenched corruption by successive governments, within the context of an expensive governance project,

have left behind crumbs which have been inadequate to choreograph a benign environment supportive of increased manufacturing and industrial production necessary for employment generation. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) recently disclosed that the nation's unemployment rate had in the second quarter (Q2) of 2015 risen to 8.2 per cent from the 7.5 per cent rate which was recorded in the preceding quarter compared to 6.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2014 (Ugwuanyi, 2015). This brings to three the consecutive rise in unemployment rate in the country since the third quarter of 2014.

According to the Bureau, the economically active population or working age, comprising persons within the age range of 15 to 64, increased to 103.5 million in the second quarter (Q2), up from 102.8 million in the first quarter while the labour force population, comprising those within the working age, who are willing, able and actively looking for work, increased to 74.0 million in Q2 from 73.4 million in Q1, indicating an increase in the labour force by 0.81 per cent (Ugwuanyi, 2015). This shows an increase of 574,498 economically active persons within 15 to 64 who joined the labour force during the quarter under review. The NBS was also credited with the report that unemployment in Nigeria was highest within the ages of 15 and 24 (13.7 per cent in Q1 2015, up from 11.7 per cent in Q4 2014), while the underemployment rate for those within the ages of 15 to 24 was 30.6 per cent (ThisDay, 2015). Generally, figures from the NBS showed that there were a total of 19.6 million people between ages 15 - 65 years who were either unemployed or underemployed in the labour force in Q2 2015, compared to 17.7 million in Q1 2015 (Ugwuanyi, 2015).

Some experts and economists have disputed these figures and argued that the unemployment crisis facing the country was much worse than the NBS was making it out to be and thought that the present statistics had been politicised (Ekpo, 2015; Udo, 2015). Although opinions are divided on this matter, diurnal unemployment narrative and its backlash in Nigeria are worrisome and demand urgent intervention by the new government of President Muhammadu Buhari to address the tough working conditions into which most Nigerians, particularly the youth, have been forced into due to unemployment.

## **THE CHINESE POLITICAL MODEL AND ECONOMIC SUCCESS**

China operates a social democracy built on two planks: Political Meritocracy where top leaders in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are appointed by the Politburo (China's executive and policymaking committee of the governing CCP) and a Village Democracy with greater participation by the Chinese people. Village elections were introduced in China in the late 1980s in order to maintain social order and combat corruption among local leaders. In 2008, more than 900 million Chinese villagers had exercised the right to vote in their preferred local representatives (Bell, 2015). Voters do not choose among political parties but directly nominate candidates and vote by secret ballot for a committee of elected candidates who serve for three years. As Bell (2015) observed, the conduct of these elections has generally been free and fair, and has improved over time.

China's political meritocracy is another leg of its political model which promotes the idea that high-level positions in the state should be based on the selection of candidates who evince ability and virtue. This system of leadership selection was institutionalised in Imperial China by means of an elaborate examination system dating to the Sui Dynasty in the sixth and seventh centuries (Bell, 2015). These examinations were abolished in 1905 signposting the end of the imperial system but were reintroduced over the last three decades. Intending government officials are normally made to pass through public-service examinations, namely, IQ-like tests with some ideological content, with thousands of applicants competing for each entry-level spot. Applicants or candidates are also expected to have performed at lower levels of government, with more rigorous evaluations at every step, to move further up the chain of political command. Top leaders are also required to have accumulated decades of diverse administrative experience, with only a tiny proportion reaching the commanding heights of government. For example, China's president, Xi Jinping's four-decade-long ascent to the presidency covered 16 major promotions through county, city, and province levels, and then the Central Committee, the Politburo, and the top spot in the Standing Committee of the Politburo, with reviews at each stage to assess his leadership abilities and virtues before he eventually was cherry-picked for the lofty position (Bell, 2015). Another report has it that Xi Jinping had managed areas with a total population of 150 million people and combined GDPs of 1.5 trillion US dollars before he landed the top job ("Is American democracy", 2015).

The Chinese government favours democratic elections at the local level because people are more knowledgeable about the ability and virtue of the leaders they choose, policies are more straightforward, a sense of community is easily forged, and mistakes are less costly. Again, the government could tinker with economic and social reform programmes at the local levels, outcome of which could determine whether such programmes could be replicated on a large scale at the national level. This process is helped by China's flexible constitutional system, which does not prescribe a strict division of powers between different levels of government (Bell, 2015). Additionally, China's political meritocracy is quite inexpensive to maintain and allows the country to develop a leadership pipeline from which it appoints its leaders.

Having positioned the CCP as a representation of the interests of the Chinese and a kind of electoral college, the Politburo, a top leadership arm of the party, is charged with the responsibility of appointing who leads the country as President for a period of 10 years. Another very noticeable sacrament of China's political model is the concept of collective leadership which means that the Politburo ensures that no maverick with eccentric Weltanschauung and hard-set but wrongheaded policies (such as the disastrous Great Leap Forward when Mao, and only Mao, decided on national policies) would dominate the political sphere like a fuhrer. This collective leadership means that checks and balances are put in place to tame political leaders, including the President and the Chinese premier.

Thus, the Chinese political system has been seen as the most competitive in the world today even more rigorous than full democracies. Its one-party system is considered to possess adaptability, meritocracy, and legitimacy while the political model is self-correcting. As a Chinese-American put it:

In 64 years of running the largest country in the world, the range of the Party's policies has been wider than any other country in recent memory, from radical land collectivization to the Great Leap Forward, then privatization of farmland, then the Cultural Revolution, then Deng Xiaoping's market reform, then successor Jiang Zemin took the giant political step of opening up Party membership to private businesspeople, something unimaginable during Mao's rule. So the Party self-corrects in rather dramatic fashions. Institutionally, new rules get enacted to correct previous dysfunctions. For example, term limits. Political leaders used to retain their positions for life, and they used that to accumulate power and perpetuate their rules. Mao was the father of modern

China, yet his prolonged rule led to disastrous mistakes. So the Party instituted term limits with mandatory retirement age of 68 to 70 (“Is American democracy”, 2015).

While the Chinese political model may not sync comfortably with mainstream democratic orthodoxy, Chinese one-party social democracy is a testament to the hardline will of the Chinese people to cultivate their own system of government which synchronises well with their unique socio-cultural memes and political traditions, and to continue to tinker with this ideological contraption in line with contemporary zeitgeist.

The political model of the Chinese may still have some shortfalls in areas such as media censorship, limitation of electoral democracy to the local political space, weak constitutionalism and rule of law, centralisation of state power with little devolution of powers, convoluted corruption, among others, yet, the system has created what now is referred to as an economic miracle (“Is American democracy”, 2015) or one of the greatest economic success stories in modern times (Morrison, 2014).

From 1979 (when economic reforms began to be implemented) to 2013, China’s real gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average annual rate of nearly 10% (Morrison, 2014). China has also emerged as a major global economic power. It is now the world’s largest manufacturer, merchandise exporter, and holder of foreign exchange reserves. China is also currently the second-largest economy after the United States, and some analysts predict that it could become the largest economy within the next few years. China’s remarkable economic boom has spawned numerous discussions of “China’s Rise”, and Beijing’s slogan “China’s peaceful rise” accentuates this notion (Morrison, 2014).

Apart from the role the size of its workforce and national productivity have played in China’s economic transformation, China’s economic might has also been attributed to factors such as visionary leadership, prudent management of resources, rapid infrastructural development, development of its educational system, promotion of a conducive and a well-supported SME environment, aggressive industrialisation and a massive manufacturing sector. Particularly, the

success in the economic transformation of the Chinese can also be attributed to their style of governance.

## **COST OF GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYMENT RATE IN CHINA**

Although literature is replete with issues of corruption in China, the authoritarian disposition of its governance system, the anti-democratic posture of its relations with citizens and the high-handed political leadership controlled by a party oligarchy, its governance model when compared with Nigeria is still cheaper, more effective and indigenous to the peculiar cultural antecedents of the Chinese people. For instance, the Chinese President, Xi Jinping earns roughly about 19,000 USD as annual salary (FlorCruz, 2013) when compared with United States President's 400,000 USD annual salary or the gargantuan annual take-home of Nigerian legislators (excluding estacode, Duty Tour Allowance, and other sundry allowances which are paid as a necessity) estimated as N18.26 million for each of the 360 members of the House of Representatives and N19.66 million for each of the 109 senators (Olufemi & Akinwunmi, 2015). However, when the illegal but hefty quarterly allowances lawmakers pay themselves as office running cost are factored in, the take-home of each lawmaker becomes more obscene in a country where a majority of the people are poor and youth unemployment rate has become scary. According to Olufemi and Akinwunmi (2015), in 2009, it was N192 million per senator per quarter while each member of the House of Representatives receives N140 million per quarter.

While the Chinese political model does not pattern its legislature after the American or British model, its Politburo which is the highest policy and law-making organ has about 25 members who do not earn such obscene amounts. Below is an example of the full-pay grade showing the monthly earnings of some political leaders in China:

1. Level 1 (prime minister): 4000RMB (\$630)
2. Level 2 (Vice prime minister, State Councillor): 3200RMB (\$503)
3. Level 3 (Province level Governor): 2510RM (\$396)
4. Level 4 (Province vice-governor, foreign ambassador): 1900RMB (\$300)
5. Level 5 (Province level government/department director): 1410RMB (\$222)
6. Level 6 ( Province level Government/department vice-director): 1080RMB (\$170)

7. Level 7 (County level government director): 830RMB (\$130)
8. Level 8 (County level government vice-director): 640RMB (\$101)
9. Level 9 (Mayor): 510RMB (\$80)
10. Level 10 (vice-mayor): 430 RMB (\$68)

Source: [中华人民共和国公务员 - 维基百科·自由的百科全书](#)

It therefore seems that the Chinese political leadership is more concerned about the economic growth prospects of its country and the improvement of the social and economic conditions of its citizens, which is why within 30 years, the country lifted almost 700 million of its citizens out of poverty, about 80% of the entire world's bottom billion, and turned an essentially agro economy into a modern industrial economy.

According to a report, wage levels in China have increased steadily over the last decade, driven by rapid economic growth and declining population growth (Wages and employment, 2015). The report also states that Chinese workers have become better organised while employers in many sectors have been forced to pay higher wages in order to recruit and retain staff. While official unemployment rate in China has been reported to vacillate between 4.0 - 4.3%, some other reports have discountenanced this as fudged, and estimated that unemployment rate in China is double or triple the official rate which is between 10 and 12% (Bloomberg News, 2016; The Economist, 2015; Trading Economics, 2016). Clearly, while the Chinese political model may not be perfect, while the system may be ridden with corruption as most democracies are (although the government of China is ruthless with officials found to be corrupt), the Chinese political leadership seems to show more patriotism, commitment, servant leadership, and political will in transforming the country from a backwoods civilisation into a frontline state in the comity of nations. The Chinese economic model and particularly its positive and unconditional friendship to African nations have also stood out.

## **IMPACT OF EXPENSIVE DEMOCRATIC POLITICS ON UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

The impact that Nigeria's expensive democratic politics has on unemployment in the country is diverse but patent. It has generated the following negative consequences:

First, there is an embedded culture of waste and mismanagement of funds which does not expand government business that could have created employment opportunities in the civil and public services for unemployed Nigerians as the Chinese leadership has done for its people. The infamous 2014 Nigerian Immigration Service employment exercise which turned into a fiasco demonstrated the unemployment crisis the nation is facing. About 125,000 candidates in Abuja, Lagos and other states turned up for the NIS employment, jostling for 4,000 positions that had been advertised and were shoehorned into stadium facilities because of their huge numbers, leading to a stampede with the deaths of some of the candidates (Imhonopi & Urim, 2015). Supposing all the monies that were pillaged, over-invoiced, expropriated, or mismanaged were committed to development causes, or were well accounted for, there would have been enough to pay salaries of workers, recruit more unemployed Nigerians and transform government business across board. Most government offices are still based on a template that is ancien regime and a far cry from achieving the required modernity, digitisation and innovation that the contemporary society demands. Nigeria is frighteningly coming to a point where some individuals are richer, more influential and more powerful than the state. Such a situation may reverse the very essence of democracy as a doctrine of government based on the rule by laws and not by individuals (EOD, 2010).

Second, Nigeria's brand of democracy which supports waste and misappropriation of funds does not allow for the deployment of pragmatic labour market policies that could have reenergised the weak labour market situation in the country. For instance, active labour market policies such as job centres and labour exchanges, training schemes and employment subsidies cannot happen in a governance atmosphere characterised by massive plundering of state resources. And passive labour market policies which require direct funding of the unemployed and other vulnerable members of the society until they find work through social security schemes, for instance, all require funding to be executed. When state funds are frittered away by compromised government officials through perfected conduit pipes, these misappropriated or mismanaged funds, some of

which are even expropriated as capital flight or colonised by the political class, deny the country of funds that would or should have been spent on the creation of labour market programmes that would have addressed the unemployment blight in Nigeria. An example of the hypocrisy and insensitivity of the elite happened on November 4, 2015, when the Nigerian Senate rejected a motion sponsored by Philip Aduda of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) representing the Federal Capital Territory for the payment of N5, 000 monthly allowance to unemployed youths in the country (Aborisade, 2015). The motion was said to have been resisted by the senators belonging to the All Progressives Congress (APC), which is the ruling party at the centre and which had promised to pay this stipend to unemployed youths in Nigeria if it comes into power (Aborisade, 2015). The action of the APC senators must be called to question and reversed by the government at the centre in order to show its honesty in fulfilling its campaign promises and in siding with the Nigerian masses who are bearing the brunt of government's prodigality and elitist narcissism.

Third, the Nigerian democratic system not only supports an expensive governance process that haemorrhages needed funds for development, but also supervises a subterranean climate that promotes cronyism, ascription, nepotism, and government by patronage, which means less qualified people find themselves in respectable positions in both the public and private sectors because of who they know and not what they know, while the very brilliant ones are condemned to spend more time in the distended labour market. This is far different from the Chinese political model where meritocracy, ability and virtues are considerations for top positions in the state.

Fourth, another very criminal impact of expensive democratic politics is the lack of adequate funding meant for citizen education. For example, while the allocation to the National Assembly in the 2015 budget was a mammoth N150 billion, the allocation to the Ministry of Education was a paltry N20 billion. This results in a school system that lags behind in terms of innovation and the employment and motivation of competent teachers and lecturers to act as purveyors of knowledge to Nigerian children. This eventually results in the unemployability of many Nigerian graduate workers who do not have the requisite skills needed by industry for their proper integration. It also means that the Nigerian education system will be churning out people whose competitiveness on the global market will be found wanting. China has proved to be different as it spends more of its revenues on education. As a report notes, in poor counties in China's Xinjiang province, where the

average GDP/capita is around \$1000 per year, the most modern buildings are the schools and Chinese children get free 12-year education (“Is American democracy”, 2015). Children from poor families are allowed to live in dormitories, and they get free food, free boarding, free textbooks, and those with top performances are offered free university education. According to the report, the single biggest government spending in China, the world’s number two economy, is education. Fifth, with a lot of discouragement on the part of very brilliant Nigerians who are edged out by the system, many begin to seek opportunities to emigrate to foreign countries where they hope to find the golden fleece or to improve their lives. Therefore, it cannot be gainsaid that expensive democratic politics which means a minority controls the vast resources and opportunities in the state does not lead to brain drain in Nigeria.

Six, another consequence of expensive democratic politics on employment opportunities is that with fewer resources and opportunities, this generates ethnic suspicion, bad blood and unhealthy competition leading to ethnic unrest and violence especially as some ethnic groups feel a strong sense of marginalisation arising from their deprivation while others close to power and its wielders, smack their lips in reckless triumphalism and bask in the incentivisation from their kindred centripetal coxswains.

Seven, lack of employment has led to the rise of a group not in employment, education and training whose future is precarious and who are bent on taking their pound of flesh. This is evident in the rise of militia groups, terror gangs and antisocial forces in the country.

Eight, with lack of funds, government is unable to provide a clement investment climate for the accretion of domestic and foreign investments which if in place ultimately would have provided the needed jobs for Nigerians.

Lastly, expensive Nigerian brand of democracy denies the government the needed fund to finance the SME sector which has been reputed to be a job creator in most countries of the world (Imhonopi & Ajayi, 2013). China’s economy is built around SMEs and that is why its manufacturing sector is renowned for massive production of goods and services. This has not been the case in Nigeria

where government is the largest earner and spender. Thus the evil of running and keeping an expensive democratic project is ominous for the continued existence of Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is evident that democracy in Nigeria, as well as in many African countries, as presently constituted, gives the impression of an elite project orchestrated to entrench the interests of this class. That Nigeria runs an expensive democratic system is not difficult to see considering that democratic politics favours the rich and that the political space is dominated by political jobbers, entrepreneurs and investors whose sole venture into politics is to improve or increase their financial assets or both. The present political class delineates barracuda instincts in the way it goes about the management of the country's resources which have been colonised by this class for itself and its aristocratic apparatchiks, amen corners and praise singers.

The concentration of vast national resources in the hands and bank accounts of a tiny minority highlights not only the predatory nature of democratic politics in Nigeria, but it also shows a democratic politics committed to maintaining an unreasonable, Mephistophelian, kleptomaniac, unpopular and plutonomic status quo at all costs which means that state funds are diverted to other selfish, personal, narcissistic and dominant class-preserving projects which do not benefit the true sovereigns of Nigeria's democratic project, that is, the masses.

Such an expensive but invidious democratic project has resulted in a situation where the country is rather under-developing instead of making any progress. Creating many problems and leading to different forms of agitations including social movements and protests, Nigeria's expensive democratic politics has generated a grotesque climate of unemployment crisis. Unemployment of citizens and the youth in Nigeria has continued to evolve to the chagrin of the people against an obese class unwilling to commit itself to national development goals. Even efforts by the National Bureau of Statistics to reform the way unemployment is measured has led to a distortion or bizarre misrepresentation of what the unemployment reality in Nigeria is. Not only does its intervention represent a politicisation of the unemployment issue in the country, but it shows that the political class is in itself conscious of the backlash that can arise from a situation where Nigerians would

negatively respond to the worsening unemployment situation in their country where the rich and political overlords are living and leading profligate lifestyles in the face of wanton pauperisation, deprivation, marginalisation, and precarisation of the majority.

Deprivation and exclusionary politics can fan the embers of hate, despondency and criminality in the people if not timely addressed. This is why this study argues that Nigeria needs to address its embedded culture of waste and mismanagement of funds. Nigeria needs to also cause a volte face to its obscenely expensive political model. Creating a political system that is indigenous to the country and that still adopts democratic sacraments may become a prerequisite for the stability of the country. Particularly, doing this will aid the country in freeing monies that would be useful for development purposes, including job creation and deployment of pragmatic labour market policies, and citizen education. These resources will also be used to reverse the present brain drain in the professional sector and unhealthy ethnic rivalry, check growing population of NEETs, promote the creation of a clement investment climate, and make funds available to the SME sector. Nigeria urgently needs to establish Leadership Criteria for political office holders to wean off unqualified political jobbers from elective positions, canvass for responsible and accountable political leadership henceforward, and reduce the cost of governance across board. The country should borrow a leaf from China.

There is also the need to engage in massive infrastructural development to support the catalysis of employment generation, provide adequate security for citizens and foreigners, commit to the fight against corruption until Nigeria wins the battle, and enable a multi-stakeholder engagement in the restructuring of Nigeria so that it benefits the majority and the deserving and not some cliquey, minoritarian and elite interests alone as is presently done. Overall, the need for an enlightened and engaged citizenship is important in order to put pressure on the political leadership to be responsible and accountable to the people.

Democratic politics, as it is presently constituted in Nigeria, is unsustainable, unviable, unrepresentative of the people, and is invidiously expensive. Government must connect more with the people who are the true sovereigns of Nigeria's democracy and must be committed to their welfare and needs in order to preserve the gains made with the return to civilian rule and to deny

those with anti-social sirens of violence from preying on an angry vast majority cross with the democratic establishment. Importantly, too, the success of the Chinese points to the strength of visionary leadership, existence of a flexible home-grown political model and political will by the ruling class to change the destiny of its people for good. Nigeria has a lot to learn from the Chinese miracle to save Nigeria from the brewing apocalypse on the horizon.

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