



UNEMPLOYMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The rate of unemployment in Africa and particularly Nigeria is increasing at a geometrical progression. This apparently spells doom for the future generation if not checked as a matter of urgency. In the case of Africa and Nigeria in particular, evidences abound to buttress the interconnectedness among unemployment, economic inequality and political participation. This scenario has overwhelming implications for sustainable political development of Nigeria. This paper undertakes to unearth the interactions between unemployment and political participation in Nigeria adopting the Marxist theory of post-colonial state which underlies the political economy approach. Data are drawn from secondary sources which, to a large extent, brings to the fore that the unemployed become victims of economic inequality, and given the high stakes in Nigeria politics, are prone to political apathy, frustration and hopelessness. The paper vehemently proposes that government should exercise the political will to engage constructively in dismantling all seemingly governance and institutional hindrances to popular participation. It is therefore, recommended that money politics be discouraged using appropriate legal measures. Various empowerment and job creation programmes should be objectively implemented to ameliorate the high incidences of economic inequality as a result of unemployment thereby encouraging greater political participation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Unemployment, Political and economic inequality, Political participation, Money politics

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INTRODUCTION/STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Studies have repeatedly shown that better-educated, wealthier and occupationally-skilled citizens are more likely, on the average, to develop politically participant attitudes. These citizens invariably tend to be more politically enlightened, more attentive to political information, more politically efficacious and better able to make use of opportunities for participation than less socio-economically privileged citizens. In short, better off citizens tend to be the most active in politics. This tendency is, however, less pronounced in voting participation and far more visible in the forming of pressure groups to influence governmental decisions.

Very unfortunately, however, about 70.2 percent of the Nigerian population lives on less than \$1 a day while 90.8 percent lives on less than \$2 a day (Oshewolo, 2010: 267). The state of poverty in Nigeria is often compounded by the widening inequality between the rich and the poor as “up to 95 percent of this great wealth is controlled by about .01 percent of the population” (Oshewolo, 2010: 265). This situation has been clearly highlighted that the total income earned by the richest 20 percent of the population is 55.7 percent while the total income earned by the poorest 20 percent is 4.4 percent.

The above notwithstanding, there are conflicting accounts as to the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The Nigerian Labour Congress at some point estimated the unemployment rate to be about 35 per cent while statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that about 10 million Nigerians (about 20 per cent of the entire labour force) were unemployed as at March 2009. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022) recently reported that 33.3 percent of Nigerians are unemployed. The question then is, how can a nation like Nigeria become great when most of the youths (the leaders of tomorrow) are unemployed and discouraged? And considering the high emphasis on money in Nigeria politics, what is the guarantee that this unemployed population who have become victims of economic inequality and immersed in poverty will make meaningful impact in terms of political participation in Nigeria? The tendency is that they will become overwhelmed with perplexity as a result of their socio-economic conditions and become predisposed to manipulations by the privileged class that they either sink into gross apathy or resort to negative tendencies to vent their frustrations on the polity for so forsaking them.

It is therefore, against the backdrop of the above that this paper sought to unearth those fundamental issues relating to unemployment and political participation in Nigeria politics. Variables such as poverty and inequality are brought to the fore in this context. Pursuant to the objectives of this paper therefore, this introduction is followed by literature review which attempts a conceptual clarification of dominant key words followed by the theoretical framework. An analysis of relationship between unemployment and political participation in Nigeria was carried out, conclusion drawn based on the findings and recommendations for policy were made.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Unemployment: A Conceptual and Theoretical Insight

In the words of Chigbu (2014), unemployment is a situation in which people who are capable and willing to work are actively seeking for job but are unable to find a suitable job, thereby making them to remain idle. In the case of Nigeria, the unemployment situation has become chronically systemic and prevalent and the solution of which seemingly overwhelm the political leadership, particularly in the present political dispensation. There are a lot of young Nigerian graduates in the labour market who are seldom meaningfully engaged. This scenario raises serious questions on the credibility of the education system as well as the sincerity of the government of the day.

However, there is need for us to take further look at categories of unemployment in order to appreciate the issue more. Unemployment can be perceived from varied dimensions. Where it is structural unemployment, it means that unemployment exists as a result of low demand in a particular commodity. This type of unhealthy demand will lead to the industry in charge of such product to reduce their labour force. To put differently, structural unemployment is as a result of low demand of a certain commodity which has low level of productivity. Frictional unemployment is that which occurs as a result of change from labour intensive technique of production to capital intensive technique of production. Therefore, the use of new technology creates room for unemployment because people will not be conversant with the use of such machine and this can lead to redundancy of workers. More so, unemployment could be considered seasonal when demand for workers is limited to a particular period of the year.

Furthermore, casual or transition unemployment usually occurs among the unskilled people. Their employment is not permanent. When a particular contract is completed labour is made redundant and thereby temporarily laid off e.g. construction industries. Furthermore, cyclical/mass/deficient unemployment occurs as a result of low demand of goods and services. The industries affected are usually many and the industries so affected will embark on retirement of their workers which will end up leading to mass unemployment. More so, under-unemployment/disguised unemployment is that which occurs when many people engage in a job that each works below his full capacity. In other words, you can say that such a person is half employed.

CAUSES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

A number of factors can be identified as responsible for unemployment situation in Nigeria. The most significant is political clientelism, which is manifest in the recklessness with which political officeholders, godfathers and other prominent politicians at various levels of governance interfere, hijack, monopolize and corner available job opportunities for their cronies and family members and friends at the detriment of the majority of qualified unemployed Nigerians. This ugly development became more pronounced in the Fourth Nigeria Republic

more than ever before. Aligned to this major factor are nepotism, favouritism, ethnicism/tribalism and bribery and corruption.

Nevertheless, there are other seemingly minor causes of unemployment as identified by Chigbu (2014).

1. **Migration:** Many people migrate to look for better job opportunities and improve their standard of living. However, rural-urban migration is partly due to the existence of greater employment opportunities in towns and cities. Therefore, unemployment causes migration of people from one geographical area to another.
2. **Poor educational system:** Unemployment has caused harm to our educational system. And in turn our educational system reproduces unemployment. People never attend school to acquire basic skills necessary for economic empowerment but they attend it to get paper qualification (certificates). This is what the Nigerian education system has turned into today.
3. **Slow rate of economic growth:** Once there is slow rate of economic growth it will result in high rate of unemployment and the economy of the country is bound to move at a very slow pace. But when a country embarks on a more serious economic planning, which is fundamentally incumbent on the government, it will help to speed up the rate of growth and development thereby creating more job opportunities in the country.
4. **Lack of social amenities:** Unemployment is in existence when the social amenities in a country are insufficiently deficient. For example, people become unemployed due to the chronic epileptic power situation in Nigeria which makes it difficult for their employers to sustain production at a level that will make it possible to retain already existing labour or even hire new hands.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

There is no doubt that unemployment has far reaching consequences on individuals, families and the national economy in general. Below are presented a summary of the effects in consensus with Iyida (2012).

1. **Low standard of living:** Unemployment adversely affects the living standard of an individual and households. When an individual is unemployed, his/her income generating capacity is jeopardized and this affects living standard and aspirations in all its ramifications.
2. **Increase in crime rate:** There is increase in crime rate (robbery, kidnapping, thuggery, youth restiveness, bunkering and other violent social vices) in the country resulting in insecurity of lives and properties.

3. **Low national income:** It causes the output per capita income to be low, thereby leading to low national income.
4. **High rate of dependency:** Unemployment causes many youth to depend on their parents or significant others for survival.
5. **Discourages education:** Massive unemployment can discourage the youths from striving to upgrade themselves educationally.
6. **Poor economy:** It may lead to stagnation of the economy which may result in depression in the economy.
7. **Leads to under-employment:** Unemployment may lead to under employment of workers, for example a graduate may end up taking up and doing a clerical job for a clerical pay.

Having noted these effects of unemployment, we shall proceed to review the concept of political participation and its associated terms.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Like most political science concepts, political participation has attracted several definitions from several scholars. Some of these definitions are generic, that is, they try as much as possible to capture all aspects and dimensions in which people can participate in politics. Some are however limited, in that they discriminate against some aspects of participation as irregular or abnormal. We consider a few of them in what follows. According to Norman and Verba in Lam (2003), political participation refers to those legal activities by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take. The above definition is restrictive emphasizing only on legal activities and thereby neglecting all other forms of political participation outside the confines of the law.

What follows below is a group of broader senses of meaning. Huntington and Dominguez in Adedeji (1997) view political participation as the activity of private citizens designed to influence government decision making. In the submission of McClosky (1998), it refers to those voluntary activities by which members of society share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. Following from the above, therefore, political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and, the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government.

What is of utmost importance to contemporary study of political behaviour is that political participation can include both legal and illegal attempts to influence governmental decisions. It is concerned with influencing the composition and conduct or personnel and

policies. It is not limited to voting at elections but includes many other ways in which citizens try to influence governmental decisions. It is based on this that we discuss in what follows, the various dimensions that political participation can take in human society.

SCOPE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

By scope of political participation we mean those broad arrays of activities that political participation covers or that can be regarded as forms of political participation. When people campaign for candidates during elections, or they attend constituency meetings or cast their ballot during voting period, we often consider their actions as political participation. Remember however, that not doing all these or doing them for certain reasons are also forms of participation in politics. A very popular slogan in party electioneering politics is that “failure to vote for a candidate is a ballot cast for the opponent of the candidate”.

Based on this logic, the scope of political participation shall be bi-patterned by Filani (2002): direct or action based, as well as indirect or attitude based political activities.

- (a) **Direct or Action Based Political Activities:** These activities refer to those that people deliberately engage in as standards of participation in politics. They include voting, attendance of meetings, campaigning, sponsorship of candidates, money and material donation, attending rallies and committee meetings etc. These actions are clear cut and need no further interpretation before they are recognized as forms of political participation. Those who participate in them often have defined political goals, even when not disclosed.

- (b) **Indirect or Attitude Based Political Participation:** These refer to people’s attitudes and dispositions that indirectly influence politics around them. This form of political participation is not necessarily clear cut, and it is often unclear if those who display them are aware of their impact as political participation. These attitudes include but are not limited to agitation, resistance, apathy, endorsement, docility, skepticism, cynicism etc. Those who display resistance attitude towards politics for instance, complement chance of leadership in extra electoral forms while apathetic persons allow other citizens have field days fielding and electing their own candidates. If the apathetic person had voted, his vote only could make any difference in number, and as he or she refuses to vote, the attitude displayed increases the chances of a candidate in opposition. This aspect is also covered by political participation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Leaning on the conceptual issues presented and in our attempt to place this study in its proper perspective, the need for a theoretical framework of analysis is quintessential.

Consequently, the paper adopts the Marxist theory of the post-colonial state. The theory is important because of its relative proficiency in analysing post-colonial political economy. The major proponent of this theory is Karl Marx though he did not *ab initio* call it Marxist theory of post-colonial states, but he advanced the following attributes of the neo-colonial state:

- i) The post-colonial state is purely an instrument of class domination.
- ii) The primitive accumulation with state power is done by domestic dominant power and certain external forces.
- iii) Post-colonial states are renter states parcelled out to the persons that use the state power for selfish ends (Ezeibe, 2010).

Marxist scholars like Vladimir Lenin, Claude Ake, Eme Ekekwe and Miliband have, in their separate studies, contributed to the development of the post-colonial theory of the state. Lenin (1984:10-11) noted that the state is a product of class struggle in society. The state emerged so that antagonistic groups will not consume themselves in fruitless struggle over the ownership of means of production. Hence the state emerged to moderate class struggle in advanced bourgeoisie states unlike in neo-colonial states where states are parts and parcels of class antagonisms it was supposed to moderate. Thus post-colonial states rather than maintain or moderate economic relations became an instrument of domination, exploitation and intimidation of the subjects (Ekekwe, 1986: 12). The post-colonial state became a specific modality of class antagonism.

Similarly, Miliband (1977: 109) insists that post-colonial states are dependent on the alien forces that colonized them and thus the state is both the source of economic power and an instrument of accumulation of economic power as the state is the major means of production. This however was a colonial heritage as colonial character has matured when independence was achieved in most post-colonial states who inherited these colonial traits with little or no modification. After independence in the periphery, there was a mere change of leadership position from foreigners to natives while the policies remained largely unchanged (Ake 1981: 88).

The Nigerian State as a post-colonial state or a periphery nation is characterized by these factors discussed above. Like other colonial states, Nigeria lacks the capacity to moderate the struggles which is pronounced between or among the various groups and states that make up Nigeria. Hence political and economic inequality or imbalances exist among and between the various states or groups that make up Nigeria. These imbalances exist in almost every sector of the economy hence most people are politically and economically marginalized or disempowered. This theoretical framework therefore, holistically captures and explains the ramifications of socio-economic cum political relations or struggles in Nigeria within which the current issue of unemployment and political participation is located.

It is in view of correcting this abnormality that the Federal Character Commission was established to uphold federal character principles. In Nigeria today, there is a tendency to over-

emphasize the federal character and worse still political affiliations and deemphasizing merit and hard work and defend mediocrity and parochialism in running of the various sectors of the economy. This explains why the Nigerian state continues to depend on the West for economic and political guidance and the tendency for the political leadership to neglect the respect for human dignity, rule of law and due process in public sector and other policy processes in virtually every sector of the politico-economic system. This produces and reproduces political and economic inequality within which periphery this study is situated.

ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Unemployment situation has reached alarming heights in Nigeria today and governments within this period have merely paid lip service in resolving the problem which has become chronic. Per annum, several hundreds of graduates are pumped into the labour market willing to work but cannot find meaningful employments. In the same period, we have witnessed high spending on electioneering and other self-serving purposes by the political leadership and politicians. Political parties compel aspirants to pick indication of interest and nomination forms for several tens of millions to the chagrin of the unemployed who find it hard to feed talk more of engaging actively in the prevailing money politics of the Fourth Republic. Unemployment indeed correlates with poverty and inequality (Okolie, Nnamani, Ezirim, Enyiazu and Ozor, 2021).

No wonder Amis and Rakodi (1997) rightly observed that the major impediment to democracy in Africa is poverty. Masses are easily cornered, brainwashed and their right of choices manipulated to a point that some of them are susceptible to bribery and can be used as political thugs to cause confusion, harassment or intimidate an opponent during elections (Maiangwa, 2009: 349). Poverty decreases both participation in democratic life and popular support for democracy (Krishna, 2006: 35). Since the return to multi-party democracy in 1999, the political space has been the exclusive preserve of the elite as majority of the population have been excluded from the political process. While there seems to be a general consensus that mass poverty could cast a shadow on democratic consolidation, “precisely why poverty undermines democracy, however, has been much less clear” (Krishna, 2006: 1). Thus, this paper sought to interrogate the subject of the relationship between unemployment (which breeds poverty and inequality) and political participation in Nigeria.

Poverty and inequality are factors interacting with unemployment to affect the level of political participation in Nigeria Fourth Republic. In this context, poverty is viewed as a humiliating dependence, lack of multiple resources that lead to hunger and physical deprivation (Eze, 2009: 446), “moneylessness” and “powerlessness” (Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010: 192), levels of income that are inadequate for well-being (NDRI, 2009: 2) among others. However, in recent times 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: poverty as a product of unemployment has various 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. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life... Absolute poverty is 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 (Mattes et al, 2003: 2).

While most of these indicators of unemployment are rife in Nigeria, there are also compelling evidence to show that the trends are on the rise. Estimates have indicated that about 70% of Nigerians live in absolute poverty (about 84 million people) (AFRODAD, 2005: 3). Similarly, Ogwumike and the World Bank 1999-2005 reports clearly show a rising profile of Nigerian population living below poverty line from 43% in 1994; 66% in 1996 to over 70% in 2004 (Eze, 2009). The severity of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria is equally glaring when other indicators of services and development are considered.

The unemployment situation results in debilitating circumstance in which individuals or groups are socially and economically denied the capacity to meet their basic existential needs in such a manner that not only encumbers them from making meaningful contribution to the socioeconomic development of their immediate community, but also disenfranchises them from the political process.

Poverty and hunger are also serious national problems. Today, the biggest worry for the poor and unemployed Nigerians is not the brightness of their political future but when the ailing economy will become well enough to create employment. Thus the government should focus on providing good economic environment and invest in human development, including health care, education, skills training and acquisition of advanced technology (Sen, 1975). Skills acquisition would enable the poor to learn both soft as well as hard skills with which to find employment and improve their lives. An effective government is therefore, at the root of achieving economic growth and development in any society.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Institutional Challenges: Part of the problems facing Nigeria is that its educational institutions are not designed for the modern economy. They lack the tools to produce good quality graduates to manage the affairs of the nation. Majority of them (the graduates/workers) lack the skills that drive human productivity. Increase in productivity would enlarge the nation's *economic pie* and reduce poverty and crime. The environment in which businesses or nations operate determines

the outcome of their activities. No nation would make any meaningful socio-economic and political stride without viable educational institutions in terms of manpower strength, adequacy of instructional materials, adequacy of teaching and learning facilities and quality of academic programmes. In its 2010 report on 'Doing Business in Nigeria 2010-Through Difficult Times', the World Bank ranked Nigeria 125 out of 182 economies surveyed in the Global Doing Business Report. The report also noted that about 90 per cent of Nigerian businesses that operate in the informal sector lack access to credit. And in its 2008 Review of World Development the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranked Nigeria 157 out of 177 in Human Development Index; it was also among the 'Least Livable' nations.

The leaders appear oblivious of the magnitude of the problems facing the economy. Although some of the problems facing Nigeria today require common sense solutions, others would involve sophisticated framework of ideas (debate, discussion and decision making) and application of modern technologies. As *Albert Einstein* has noted, 'the specific problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them' (cited in *Dike*, February 1, 2000). For the economy to grow and for businesses to thrive, the institutions responsible for human capital development should be properly funded, equipped and managed to enable them produce advanced skilled manpower to manage the affairs of the nation.

Governance Challenges: Related to leadership problem is bad governance. Governance has among others, been defined as a system of values, policies, and institutions by which a society manages its economic, social, and political affairs through interactions within the state, civil society and private sector (Shabbir, 2004; UNDP, 1997; UNDP, 2000). Thus governance comprises the mechanisms and processes for citizens and groups to articulate their interests, to work together and mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations with rules, institutions and practices that set limits and provide incentives for individuals, organizations and firms. Good governance refers to the question of how a society can organize itself to ensure equality of opportunity and equity (social and economic justice) for all citizens (Shabbir, 2004). It also promotes people-centered development.

Building a vibrant economy or restoring growth to a sluggish economy takes resources; to ensure long-term growth and prosperity, Nigeria must use its resources wisely, invest in advanced technology and rebuild the institutions and infrastructure without which the economy will not gain from the 'power of productivity'. A nation enjoys higher standards of living if the workers can produce large quantity of goods and services for local consumption and extra for export. The deficiencies in the economy lead to low productivity, poor quality products and competition in the global market place. And without sustainable growth and meaningful employment opportunities the people would lose interest in the society (apathetic).

CONCLUSION

Unemployment is a threat to political participation in democracy while democracy is a vital instrument that propels political proficiency, economic development and social stability of any nation state. Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been a mere political desideratum hanging on a limping utopia. A true democracy is a sine qua non for the development of all sectors of any country's economy. Drawing from the scholars of Marxian orientation we insist that the socio-economic and political inequality under Nigeria's Fourth Republic capitalist democracy is deliberately maintained by the bourgeois state, which protects capitalist private ownership of the means of production, facilitates exploitation of the working people and suppresses their struggle against the capitalist system. From this, it is glaring that the true nature of the bourgeois state simply put is nothing but a political organization of the economically dominant class which sustains the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Regrettably, the practice of the so-called democracy in the 21st Century Nigeria is intrinsically characterized by political instability, social macabre, cultural balderdash and economic quagmire, resulting in unemployment of all forms, leading to abject hunger and indescribable poverty. The attendant implication of this misnomer are practical existence of all manner of crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, sexual slavery, pen-robbery, and electioneering bickering and hooliganism.

Caught up in this precarious and pathetic situation, there is an urgent need to redress the situation if democratization must live up to its billings in Nigeria. It is necessary to reconcile the disjuncture between unemployment and political participation in Africa particularly in Nigeria. If democratization via political participation and development must be genuinely nurtured and sustained, there is an urgent need for a reversal of the trend; social mobilization garnished with economic empowerment in all its ramifications is a highly useful and pivotal option. For democracy to have any meaning, government must be accountable to the people, not only for the resources they received and spend, but for the very policies they formulate and execute. In this respect, if there is so much faith in democracy, it is because of the 'belief that democratic political processes will make the state perform better, curb corruption, create employment opportunities, rationally allocate resources and secure for the individuals a dignified place within the civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

Bearing in mind the major issues identified in this paper, a number of recommendations are considered apt for policy.

- **Discourage money politics:** Government should enforce stringent measures to discourage money bags in politics. Appropriate legislations should be put in place to that effect and government should manifest the political will to ensure compliance.

- **Equal socio-economic cum political opportunities for all:** The government should put practical measures in place via implementation of programmes and policies aimed at equal socio-economic and political empowerment of the citizenry.
- **Establishment of viable industries:** Government should establish more industries in major sectors of the economy and in other areas establish an enabling business environment for individuals and corporate bodies to do so to absorb the teeming unemployed persons in our society.
- **Establishment of operational skills acquisition centres:** People should be encouraged to open skills acquisition centres where people can improve themselves by learning new and relevant skills that will help them in the world of work and wealth creation.
- **Enforcement of discipline in the public service:** Workers should be disciplined enough not to alter their year of birth or working age so that they can go for their retirement at the appropriate time. This will pave way for more youths to be employed in the civil service thereby ameliorating the incidence of unemployment.
- **Provision of functional social amenities:** The availability of social amenities, for example provision of stable electricity and other infrastructure can encourage the growth of industries in different parts of the country thereby reducing unemployment in the country.
- **Re-planning of educational curriculum:** The education system and its curriculum should be re-planned and the appropriate facilities and incentives provided by the political leadership and other stakeholders so as to train people that would be able to create employment for themselves.

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