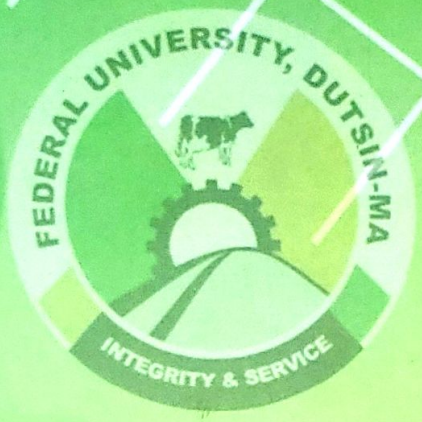


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Youth Participation and Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper explored secondary and empirical sources of data through qualitative methods while adopting Gabriel Almonds theory of structural functionalism as its theoretical underpinning. The paper posited that youths play a decisive role in Nigeria's socio-political development however, the retrogressive participation and nonchalant attitude of youth in the fourth republic on politics and governance stalls the Nigerian developmental process. This is because the youth population have been relegated and reduced to thugs and violent merchants by the governing elite class. It is against this backdrop that this paper studies the realities of youth participation, governance and the development of the Nigerian state in the fourth republic. The findings of the study reveal that it is unlikely to actualize good governance without an active youth force. This in retrospect is because of the fast liberalizing and globalizing world. The paper argued that social factors like unemployment, illiteracy, deficit of trust in the system, corruption and poverty are germane factors that inhibit youth participation in politics and governance. The study recommends among other things that the implementation and the practicality of the "not too young to rule" act should favor all Nigerians regardless of a person's class or ethnicity.

Key Words: Election, Governance, Participation, Politics, Youth

Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that youths are the necessary force needed for social, economic and political transformation of any nation (Angela, 2019). Nigeria's extenuated system have negated this positive stance where youth form the pillars for a nation's growth and development. The fourth republic in comparison to previous republics have so far been plagued with retrogression in the level of youth political participation where youth political apathy typifies the political space holds that governance is meant to be a dynamic process where each generation has a role to play in the proper transition and stage setting for the next generation but the Nigerian politicians operate from the realm of "Divine right of rulership" in a so called Democracy (Ololade, 2021). It is a generally accepted viewpoint that the backbone to growth and sustainability of any society is highly dependent on the number of active young people living within that society who will equally ensure its continuity. However, this is often problematic when conclusion is drawn by a mere correlation between the population of youths and development within a state.

On this note, diverse schools of thought share different views. One school holds that youths are not capable of governing at any level of society and therefore should not be trusted with power, further pointing to developed democracies such as the United States and Britain who have older leaders in power

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(Okoduwa, 2006). For instance the current president of the United States, Joe Biden (79) the immediate former President of the united states, Donald Trump (76) and the former Prime Ministers of Britain, Boris Johnson (58), Theresa May (65) and that of Germany, (68) Angela Markel (Ofiong, 2018). Contrastingly, some school debunks such claims by putting forth the argument that some youths have been able to write their names in the sand of time, pointing to leaders such as President Emmanuel Macron in the political space, Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Jaylen Arnold, Marley Dias and Isra Hirsi among a dozen others who have made remarkable impact in their various fields of endeavor and have been able to influence the world for the better (Waterford, 2020; Akinyetun,2021; Ofiong, 2018; Olufowobi, 2018; Okoduwa,2006)

Youth political participation, governance and development have been closely studied by scholars in different time. For instance, Ake (2001) argued that a major driver of underdevelopment in Africa is the duo stompers, slavery and colonialism. His argument, hammers on the fact that a large chunk of valuable youths was taken from Africa to develop the Europe and America. In another lens, Okoduwa (2006), holds that gerontocracy equally brings development. However, the fact still remains that most youths in Nigeria have showed little interest in politics and leadership despite their conferred stake in election and democracy. Conversely, the sit-tight political elites, who have a financial hegemony over the nation's politics, have frustrated reasonable youths who seek to change the prevalent narrative of gerontocracy. (Achebe, 1984; Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Gbemisola, 2014; Ukiwo, 2003). Youths scowl when it comes to politics because the political elite have consolidated on the division of the colonial masters further stiffening the highly pronounced ethno-religious divides.

A basic inhabitant to youth participation is the lack of cooperation and mutual understanding on the stakes of youths in politics in Nigeria among the youth population. Akinyetun (2021), Galstyan (2018), Ofiong (2018) posited that, some youths are stooges in the hands of the old political elites, working against their fellow youths at the polls. Akin to this claim, is the common belief among the youths that elections in Nigeria is not a free and fair process. Thus, there votes do not count in the true sense of the words (Forbig, 2005). On another note, Wenge (2021) summarized that on the part of the youth there are various factors working against them such as incompetence; 'pull him/her down syndrome', and lack of financing. Never the less, there is a growing awareness on the opposite need for a gladiatorial political participation among the Nigerian youths of which shall be discussed in this paper subsequently. The inability of the Nigerian government over the years to harmonize population explosion via employment, security, eco-political inclusions and education serves as a threat to the very existence of the nation itself. A report by the Statista (2022) Africa's population is projected to double in 2055 with a projection of 2.5 billion people. Recent data also shows that over 60 percent of Africa's population are youths below the age of 24 years (Macrotrends, 2021).

This mighty force of youths is to Africa a double edged sword as it presents on one hand an opportunity if harnessed, and the other hand an albatross if over looked and mismanaged. In Nigeria, it is evident that the upsurge in daily committed crimes and poverty points to the failure of the government in creating an environment for youth participation, inclusiveness and development. Giving that youths are full of agility and dexterity to learn and relearn, the phrase "leaders of tomorrow" captures the dynamism of youths especially in Nigeria whose future can be said is dependent on. The contention however, remains in the geometric progression of population growth in

Nigeria daily. For instance from 2015 to 2019 there was a 13.2 percent increase in birth i.e the number of young people born into the country in just four years (Macrotrends, 2021). This data begs the question, How does this explosive population growth translate to good governance and development as desired by Nigerians?

It is against this background that this paper assesses the degree of youth political participation and how this affects the quality of governance in Nigeria. The paper considers a wide range of literatures to fully scrutinize the "how" and "why" Nigerian youths are included or excluded in politics and governance. This paper is divided into five parts. The first is the introduction, the second is the review of related literatures, followed by the Historical and theoretical review of youth participation in Nigeria; taking into account the participation of youths in politics from 1963 to 2019 (first to fourth republics), this is because the paper intends to explore the pattern of growth and youth participation from the first republic to the fourth. Section four expounds on the role of youths in governance and lastly, section five draws conclusion and recommendation for policies and actions.

Literature Review

Modern day representative democracy is often compared with the direct democracy of the ancient Greek-city states. Central to such comparisons is to draw out the patterns and undercurrents of political participation and how population as a part of democracy is pivotal in daily decision making (Akinyetun, 2021). During the primeval democracy in Greece decisions (participation) were made directly by the Greek citizens. Modern democracy being an extension of the Greek direct model of democracy consolidates on population, where the people with the highest votes choose who represents them directly in government, and to make decision on their behalf (Wallach, 2006; Galstyan, 2019:3, Hilker & Fraser, 2009; Aghahowa, 2006); Akinyetun, 2021). Youth Political participation is yet another polygonal concept in political science and election studies. The concept according to Akinyetun (2021) is a twin concept and can easily be understood from the prism of eccentricity followed by a holistic interpretation.

Although there is no consensus definition on politics, participation and governance their employment in discussions and literatures is dependent on factors such as environment, time and space. Politics according to Sunday and Ekhosuei (2013) occurs where "people disagree about distribution of means and have, at least some procedures for the resolution of such disagreement". In this context politics is seen as the creator of conflict and equally the means of resolving such conflicts, the paradoxical meaning of politics reveals the farce of politics in Nigeria. No wonder Harold Lasswells definition of politics is often employed to describe the Nigerian politics, as "the process of who gets what, when and how". Michael (2018) posited that the question remains on whether the youths should be engrossed in this process of who gets what, when and how maintain the front row seat as stooges or take what over government by force?

The concept 'youth' is nebulous according Nachana'a (2015), time and space are the major determinants of understanding the various definitions of youth. However, conceptualizing the concept 'youth' is a commemoration of many variables such as age, demography and political categorization (Anne-Marrie, 2020). The United Nation's definition is captured by an age grade categorization. To the Organization, anybody (male or female) that falls under the age of 15 and 25 is considered a youth. Similarly, in Nigeria, a youth is a person who falls under the age range of 18-29 years (Nachana'a, 2015). Conversely, some cultures in Africa, define a youth from the level of responsibility he/she handles efficiently. In retrospect, the pre-colonial Nigeria upholds such postulations, it is

equally extended to the physical attributes of an individual. For instance, signs of maturity/youthfulness in the female gender is observed when she experiences her first menstruation, for the male gender, the physical mode of identification is the beards on his face which is further correlated with how well he handles responsibility in the farmland and other gender ascribed roles (Elaigu, 2005). There is often a contention in the process of differentiating between an adolescence and youth; given the fact that they fall within the same age range. Nachana'a (2015) in a comparative analysis, alludes that the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) sees adolescence which is often synonymous to youth as the age of 10-19 and youth from the age of 15-24 and lastly, young people fall from the age range of 10-24. However, the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigerian, states categorically the condition for voting and contesting in an election. Section 117(2) of the 1999 constitution provides that:

> Every citizen of Nigeria, who has attained the age of eighteen years residing in Nigeria at the time of the registration of voters for purposes of election to any legislative house, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election. (Section 117(2), 1999 constitution of the F.R. of Nigeria)

Aside the constitutional disposition for being a youth, individuals in Nigeria can be gainfully employed without attaining age 18 given credence to the assertion that culturally, the state of being a youth is hitched on responsibility. This also can be alluded to the fact that Nigeria's population grows geometrically while the creation of resources retrogresses. Consequently, leading to rise in nefarious behavior like crime, cultism, thuggery and terrorism. (Saharareporters, 2017).

Political participation is yet another concept that does not have a converging definition among scholars which again, time and space account for such ambiguity. To participate according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is 'to take part in' or become involved in an activity or event. The totality of those activities that private individuals engage themselves directly or indirectly for the selection or election of government personals is referred to as political participation (Verba & Nie, 1972) similarly, Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback, & Nord, 2011 defined political participation as the formal and informal involvement of members of a political society on election exercises as responsible citizens. On another note, Van Deth (2014) as cited in Nachana'a (2015) describes the concept of political participation as thus "an activity that is voluntary and not ordered by a ruling class or required by law as it involves people in their role as non-professionals or amateurs and it concerns government, politics or the state. Political participation goes beyond voting it also involves the actions of private individuals and groups who seek to influence government and policies".

Youth participation in politics denotes, the participation of youths in political activities such as voting, campaigning, contesting for an election, and staging demonstration or protests in public places. Arowolo and Abe (2008) argue that the primary reason for political participation in any society, either developed or developing, is to influence and seek control of political power for the organization of society in line with collective or individual interests. This perception of political participation puts political parties and pressure groups in the limelight as a legal means of actualizing the collective interest of individuals in an organized sense.

Most times, youth participation in politics are not conventional but unconventional; for instance, youths all around the world have at

some point in time been involved in the overthrow of governments and pioneered transition from autocratic regimes to Democracy. For instance, the political revolution, that led to the Arab spring, which had spread across most of the Arab world (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain) shows that youth when dissatisfied with a particular system of government can unconventionally demand for a total restructuring (Lin, 2011). Some scholars, such as Carlisle (2015) and Whyte (2013) argue that Nigerian youths (individually and collectively) are beginning to awaken their political consciousness as evidently seen in the increase of youth in mattes of politics and government, especially, politics in the grass root even though their efforts are often frustrated by the elite politicians.

Haralambos (2001) identifies the disincentives to proper youth political participation as poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in which a large number of youths are entombed. Similarly, Ibezim (2019) as cited in Akinyetun (2021) argues that if the government can effectively address the challenges of unemployment, underemployment, social and political marginalization, and youth capacity building, youth political participation in the positive would be actualized and laying off of the negative impact it has on the nation. Togbolo (2006) submits that the ultimate problem surrounding poor youth political participation in Nigeria is poverty and illiteracy, he further argues that without any deliberate efforts to change this dastard narrative confronting the nation, the youths would remain in such quagmire of deficiency and ineptness. As a result of the above mentioned challenges, Omelle (2005) holds that Nigerian politicians have since the nations inception banked on such challenges to augmenting there gains by using the large army of ignorant youths as political thugs and stooges. In the light of the foregoing, the central concern of creating an enabling environment for the youths to bring their productive quota through their resourcefulness to bear on the political and developmental process is tied to government's administrative capability. Given that governance is the process of creating, distributing and utilization of a state's available resources to achieve development (Akinyetun, 2021; Adegbami & Adepoju, 2017). Thus the level of development within a state is measured by how well both natural and human resources are handled by its leaders to foster the desired development within that state

Historical Overview of Youth Political Participation in Nigeria

Youth participation in politics dates back to the pre-colonial days. The entity called Nigeria was prior a geographical location that is comprised of independent nation who had distinct histories, cultures, religions as well as disparate level of youth functionality and participation. Hence, youth political participation during colonialism can be understood from the kind of responsibility and functions they perform in the pre-colonial era. It is worth clarifying, that Nigeria's pre-colonial societies had no organized administrative structures, legal system, political and social systems that functioned coherently with each other. This assertion has no base for factuality and truth (Olawale & Bolaji, 2020). The Hausa-Fulani pre-colonial traditional system, maintained a strongly held socio-political system in which the youths play a sacrosanct role in security, economic and political wellbeing of the society. The youths who were popularly known as "Mai Gida" in an inferred translation means "Husband", they formed the decision making body of their household and extensively their communities. Every household is being represented by the most senior adult (the Mai-gida) (Crowder, 1978; Olawale & Bolaji, 2020).

Similarly, the Igbo pre-colonial society is often regarded by historians as an egalitarian

democratic society; its citizens play a major role in decision making. The Igbo traditional society has been described as a direct democracy similarly to that of the ancient Greece, in fact the participation of youths in politics ensured the continuity of that society, the youths popularly referred to as the Age Grades contribute in defense of community from external attacks, enforcement of law and order, conflict resolution and more importantly the engineering and implementation of community developed projects. The age grade wields the power to declare curfew or prohibit people from attending rites like funerals (Vincent, 2017; Crowder, 1978). Before the advent of colonialism, the south western part of the country, the Yoruba traditional society maintained an orderly and unified political system with an organized youth network who were responsible for the promotion of the interest of youths within each kingdom and were the implementers of government (Oba's and Elders) decisions. The youths were called "Egbe Odo" who were mostly employed under the office of the "Eso" (the Army), they are used in wars and defense of the nation. From the aforementioned it can be deduced that the participation of youths in pre-colonial Nigeria was more pronounced and definite (Olawale & Bolaji, 2020).

Colonialism in Africa upped the level of participation among the youths in Africa, it started after youths from the different parts of the continent discovered the shared peril of subjugation by the European imperialist. Youths from within and in the diaspora became united and shared a strong nationalistic feeling and patriotism, which occasionally gave birth to the Pan-African movement that advocated the liberation of the black race and total decolonization of Africa as a home for the black man (Kedourie, 1971). The Movement for the decolonization of Africa saw the establishment of the youth coxswained West African Student Union (WASU), which encouraged the staid involvement of African student in their respective countries insisting that the European colonialist should review there discriminatory, imperialist and racial based policies and actions (Ajayi, 1972; Okinuwa, 2010). The leadership of prominent youths such as Herbert McCauley, Julius Ojo-cole in WASU inspired the formation of the Nigerian Student union in 1956. The union became a platform for the recruitment and the education of youths towards a more pronounced political consciousness among youths in Nigeria (Okuniwa, 2010).

It is not out of place to say that the fight for and the eventual independence of Nigeria was as a result of solemn contributions of the Nigerian youths' (Michael & peace, 2015). The army of educated youths championed the fight against colonial expansion and independence. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Anthony Enahoro, Herbert McCauley, Chief Obafemi Awolowo among others were prominent youths who had consistently deprived the colonialists of reasons to not consider handing out Nigeria her independence (Olawale & Bolaji, 2020). Youth participation in Nigeria was at its peak and perhaps ravenous from the first republic to the third. Youth in other words have led the trail not just during the colonial Era but in the post-colonial dispensation particularly, the 1960 to 1989. Olawale & Bolaji, (2020) hold strongly that.

> The activism, political sagacity and consciousness the Nigerian youths were known for, now seem, as though, they had never existed nor currently existing in the contemporary times. It's now a case of exhibition of political behaviors such as hooliganism, terrorism, violence, Get-rich-quick syndrome, win-at-all-cost syndrome, corruption and many more by contemporary Nigerian youths, which have consequently brought Nigeria's political ship to an undesirable point. (Olawale & Bolaji, 2020)

The position of Olawale and Bolaji (2020) give credence to the fact that there is a decline in the level of youth political consciousness, nationalism, patriotism which affects directly their level of political participation. Most Nigerian youths are no longer interested in the politics as it should concern them given that the early nationalist fought vehemently for the independence of which this contemporary cohort of youths now enjoy (Fabiyi, 2010; Folade, 2007; Olawale & Bolaji, 2020).

The fight for self-government from the colonial rule, saw the formation of political parties in Nigeria. The pioneering nationalist who were youths this movement and birthed Political parties like the National Democratic Party, Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) 1923, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) 1933, the National Council of the Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) in 1944, Action Group (AG) in 1950, and but not limited to the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) in 1950 (Michael & Peace, 2015; Ololade, 2021). It is evident that in the fourth republic, the role of youths has been undermined in Nigeria and it becomes paramount according to IDEA (2018) for youths to take risks and engage in political processes, build on positive experiences and to engage in oppositional activities.

Theoretical Underpinning

The Gabriel Almond's Structural functionalism theory is adopted as the theoretical groundwork for this paper. Generally, the structural functionalism theory sees every segment of the society as important and indisposed, especially in terms of their prearranged functions. According to Macionis (2011), Almond's structural functionalism is apt in understanding the complex functioning of society because of its Macro-level approach. Society to Almond is likened to an organism made up of several parts which have evolved over the years. Emphasis is placed on the actors within the political system who play an important role in the stability and continuity of the system. Spring (1999) holds that according to the Structural functional school there are four major challenges faced by a political system which are; penetration and integration (state-building), loyalty and commitment (nation-building), participation, distribution. Nigeria have over the years' experience several agitations by numerous groups within the country clamoring for equality in the distribution of resources as well as power and inclusiveness (Kingsley & Prouza, 2016; Tekena, 2008; Saharareporters, 2021). Out of the diverse groups clamoring for inclusiveness and equal opportunity to participate in politics are the million aggrieved Nigerian youths.

In line with the structural functionalism school of thought, the Nigerian political system is a commemoration of several interconnected components of which each independent part plays a vital role in the stability and sustenance of the system as a whole. Youths are in view of this theory, regarded as a functional segment of the society. Youth exclusion from the political system retards the growth of the system. Political participation is one of the safest ways for ordinary youths to influence and pioneer substantial change within the Nigerian state (Wenge, 2021). Globally, youths are considered a formidable force in any society. This is correlated with the astounding advantages the youths present to a nation but only when harnessed or better still when given the environment and opportunity (Montgomery, 2001;Adams,2011). Youth involvement in the politics particularly in the governance of Nigeria would automatically reduce the level of agitations by some segment of the society which are majorly championed by youths (Wenge, 2021). It can be deduced from the position of the structural functional school that an improved participation of youths in politics reduces the tendencies of having a repeated cycle of an elite dominated political system who are accused of ignoring the problems of the

masses and to address the surging social ills the befalls the nation.

Youth Participation and Governance in Nigeria

Behind the general belief of political inexperience and the regressing interest among the Nigerian youth, is on the flip side a vibrant and hardworking youth population. However the latter, dominates political discuss, further undermining the capacity of youths in politics in Nigeria (Okaiyeto et al, 2021). Despite numerous emphasis on the need for inclusion and participation of youths in governance, the old politicians in the fourth republic have made empty promises for inclusion without marching them with actions. However, the fortunes of the Nigerian youths have seemingly changed with the signing into law the "Not Too Young to Run" bill, by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018. The law presents to the youth the legal backing to contest elections into the office of the President, Governor, House of Representative and the House of Assembly respectively (Etim & Duke, 2019; Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2019).

The law had addressed a major impediment to youth political participation especially in forming the base for political inclusion. It was equally a watershed in the political history of Nigeria because (1) it amended the provisions in sections 65,131,106 and 117 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that disenfranchised against the young people (2) it awakened the death political consciousness among the youths in other words encouraging them to participate in governance. In the 2019 general elections there was an increase in the number of youths contesting various positions for instance, the Peoples Coalition Party (PCP) portrayed a 37-year for the presidency in 2019 among others young contesters running against the incumbent President, Muhamadu Buhari. The candidate of the PCP, Felix Nicholas pulled a total of 110, 196 votes. Perhaps the results of the election were a paragon outcome that needs applauding (Onyedika, 2021).

The contention about the credibility and pedigree of youths in governance is still in question aback the first republic, where the leadership of the nation rests on the shoulders of young lads such as Obafemi Awolowo (age 37), Sardauna (36) and Nnamdi Azikiwe (39) who had proven beyond a doubt that age was indeed not of importance as widely perceived (Webmaster, 2016). However, there were cases of youths making a fiasco in governance for instance In 2016, Yahaya Bello who was then the youngest governor in Nigeria betrayed the trust of Kogi youths who have rallied to ensure his victory at the polls, unfortunately his actions and inactions as a youth called for a sectional criticism of young people as incapable to be trusted with power. Yahaya Bello went down in history as the worst governor in Nigeria's history (Seun, 2021; Austin, 2021; Saharareportes, 2021).

Conversely, in the legislative arm of government, there was a 27.4 percent increase in youth candidates who won elections into the House of Representative as compared with the 18 percent in the 2015 elections. Akin to this, the State House recorded a 41.8 percent increase in the 2019 elections as compared to 29 percent in 2015 elections (YIAGA, 2019). Wenge (2021) holds that the increase in youth candidates is attributed to the passage of the Not Too Young to Run Act in 2018 which aided in setting the stage. In states such as Oyo, Zamfara, Plateau and Kwara states 4 youths under the age of 35 years became speakers of their states houses of assembly alongside a total of 101 young people who contested in different positions in 2019 elections (Onyedika, 2021).

Going by this statistics, Musa, Hamza & Ziporah (2010) posits that there are two major ways that youths can participate in political development. It can be through rational or acceptable means similarly to this assertion,

Onyedika (2021) argues that Nigerian youths have from 2015 demanded accountability and transparency from the government whether it has a rational or acceptable coloration. The October #EndSARS protests gives weight to the above contention, the protest brought the whole nation to a standstill and for the first time the Nigerian youths took to the streets as against primordial sentiments to demand for transparency, accountability and a total restructuring of the Nigerian political system. This position is shared similarly by Ezinwame (2022) who argues that the despite legislations that tend to encourage youth political participation in Nigeria, the reality of politics in Nigeria is that of spreading the hegemony of ageing politicians through a deliberate discouragement of education and unemployment so as to maintain the access to youth's recruitment as political thugs.

The #EndSARS protest of October, 2020 was an exhilarating civic awakening to Nigerian within and abroad. Thus the protest was a resounding gung to the ears of the older political elites, it equally sent the message loud and clear to the powers that be that youths are no longer bystanders on the affairs of the country. It becomes paramount for youths to consolidate on the tensions laid in the hearts of the older politicians, the awakening, the popularity, and the continuous failure of the government to take over the mantle of leadership in the subsequent elections (Ololade, 2021).

Selected Challenges to youth political participation in governance

Firstly, some youths share the belief that a direct engagement in politics via constitutionally defined processes like political parties and the government itself is a collaboration with the corrupt system they are trying to change (Ignatius, 2021;Onuoha,2014) . This ideological trend among other reasons accounts for the recourse of other means to convey their plights and frustrations. This is evident in the surge of insecurity and the proliferation of diverse militia groups sprouting and gaining ground within the Nigerian political space (William, 2021). More recently, the peaceful #EndSARS protest that happened on October 20, 2020 is the spitting image of how bad the government has performed over the years, hence, the political reawakening among the youths (Sotunde, 2021) For the most part youths have consolidated on the failure of the government to provide the enabling environment for growth through unconventional ways for instance the notorious youth driven terrorist organization such as Boko Haram and Bandits have through direct or indirect means affected government's policies and decisions for the benefit of their members (BBC, 2014).

The deficit of trust, the stringent and rigorous system of election created by the financially strong elites fuels the frustration of youths who are dissatisfied with the lack of responsiveness and corruption of the elites which consequently propels the use of violent means. Akin to this, the other percentage of youths have decried the exorbitant price for purchasing nomination forms from political parties for instance, the cost of nomination form for the presidency in the two major political parties, APC and PDP is trending at 45 million and 12 million respectively (Samson, 2018)

Illiteracy

One of the impediments to youth political participation in Nigeria have been illiteracy. According to Microsoft Encarta dictionary, illiteracy means lacking education or knowledge. It would be careless to say that education accounts for competence and that illiteracy breeds terrible leadership but this is not to say it that education is less crucial in leadership. Not until recently, the Nigerian constitution had empowered citizen with only a first school leaving certificate to contest sensitive positions like the presidency (Eniayo, 2018). According to

Knoema (2020) youth illiteracy rate in Nigeria stands at 9.43 million.

The bottom line is an empowerment, education empowers youths with the knowledge to make sound decisions because it is an embodiment of values, norms and skills which aids member of the society to embrace the standards and to become better members all the same (Umar, 1993). Musa, Hamza & Ziporah (2010) holds strongly that the high level of illiteracy in Nigeria is being exploited by politicians who are providers of education in Nigeria through there absurd education policies and allocations at the detriment of the youths. Given the violent nature of politics in Nigeria, politicians employ whatever means possible to secure a win at the polls including brainwashing and indoctrinating some youths against one another. This has been a major impediment to the ability of the youths to individually and collectively support credible and genuine candidates. (Wenge, 2021, Musa, Hamza & Ziporah, 2010)

Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty and unemployment plagues youth political participation in Nigeria. Assessing Nigeria's poverty and unemployment rate, one may conclude that Nigeria is one of the poorest nation in the world, however taking into consideration the ample mineral resources that lay fallow and the spoils from petroleum (Adeniji, 1999), the question often asked by some Nigerians is whether the unaddressed poverty and unemployment is a deliberate effort to keep the youths dependent and available for the elite politicians. For instance, youths that are able to finish from the tertiary institution are automatically ushered into the labour market. Wenge (2021) holds that the informal sector of the Nigerian economy have been left to struggle with millions of unemployed youths of which the available jobs are only but a few. The unemployed and poverty stricken youths are exploited by desperate politicians who uses them as thugs. (Wenge, 2021). In Nassarawa state,Musa,Hamza & Ziporah (2010) argues thus:

> "Banga" and "Kuge" has remained the most common and gainful jobs for illiterate and semi-illiterate youths in the State since the advent of this democratic dispensation in 1999. Youngsters are in the payroll of all local government councils and development area councils as compensation for the role they played in the election (thuggery)… (Musa,Hamza & Ziporah, 2010)

Evidently, the high level of poverty and unemployment is as a result of the failure of the state to attend to the welfare of the people (Ololade, 2021) in other words, poverty and unemployment divest youth access to opportunities such as contesting in an election. Akin to this argument is the contention of the enactment of the not too young to run bill which clearly states that the youths can contest for any public office however, with the persistent level of poverty and unemployment youths may have to resolve to the coffers of the elite politicians for endorsement and financial sponsorship (Wenge, 2021). Invariably, this has created an atmosphere for the youths to engage in despicable and violent acts on behalf of the politicians. Similarly, to this Ololade (2021) argued that "poverty had created the base for many in the political elite to consider youths as only being suitable for roles as political enforcer, purveyors of violence and other nefarious purposes".

It would be haphazard to draw conclusions that only external factors are the major limitations to youth political participation without looking inwards at the youths themselves, it has already been established that over 50 percent of voting population in Nigeria are youths (YIAGA, 2019). Going by this demography, it shows that a unified and coordinated youth system can in a

single trial secure a win at any level of government. However, the reverse is the case in Nigeria, for instance in the 2019 general elections there were quite a number of youth who contested for the position of the presidency with Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. Onyedika (2021) posits that there are over 10 political parties who had youths as presidential flag bearers. For Instance, the Peoples Coalition Party (PCP) emerged Felix Nicholas (37 years old) as their flagbearer, Chike Ukaegbu (35 years) of the Advanced Allied Party (AAP), Nseobong Nsehe (33years) of the Restoration Party of Nigeria (RP) and Ahmed Buhari (36 years), of Sustainable National Party (SNP) to mention but a few.

Unfortunately, the pull-down syndrome waters down most attempts by youth politician to contest in an election. Youths campaign against their fellow youths. In a report by Sahara reporters (2017) Ohimai Amaize (age 27) who had served as a special adviser to Mallam Bolaji Abdullaji, minister of youth development in 2011 decried the disunity among the Nigerian youth as thus:

> I remember being labelled with all sort of names in the social media and the only crime I committed was taking a political appointment to work with the Nigerian Government, every ministry where I served as a ministerial aide, much of the attacks I faced came from young people. Ministries that were forgotten suddenly became trending topics on twitter. They completely forgot that I was a young person like them and needed their support to succeed. As far as some were concerned I just joined their oppressors on the other side. (SaharaReporters, 2017).

Youths ultimately play an important role in the determining who occupies any political office in Nigeria Barika, Essien & Nenbee (2021) reiterate that youth are themselves the reason for their weak participation. They further added that Fear is an inherent factor that weakens their boldness. Youths such as Yahaya Bello among other youths who have been fortunate of becoming governors have however set a bad precedence and had shattered the trust for other youths who are credible and competent for such positions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It needs no emphasis that youths are the most important segment of any society. Nigeria is considered a lucky nation because it is not just the most populous black nation in the world but it equally has sustained itself a place among nations with high youth population density which is considered an asset for national development. Despite several attempts to foster youth participation in governance, Nigerian youths have yet to become the leaders of tomorrow as they have often been called because the country have continued to march older politicians into positions of power. It is unfortunate that sometimes this is done in collaboration with the youth population who are at the receiving end. This study was able to discover that youth unemployment, poverty and illiteracy are the major external factors that have hampered the participation of youths in Nigeria. More so these impediments are deliberately unaddressed by the powers that be. However, the youth have on their own been a stumbling block for themselves through their lack of unity and cooperation. This study dares to conclude that democracy itself is about number and the Nigerian youths have more than enough man power to ensure their victory in the polls as seen from the prism of the #EndSARS protest of October 2020.

Recommendations

a The government at all levels should revisit the implementation of the 'Not too Young to run' legislation and ensure that the law is backed with the enabling environment for

youths who are financially weak to contest in an election without prejudice or segregation.

b The government should foster the creation of leadership and training centers in all local government areas across the 37 states of Nigeria to ensure that young people are exposed to the working of governance and politics. More so, leadership and training should be included in the academic curriculum for children and youths from primary to the tertiary institutions.

c The political environment should be designed in such a way that there is an equal playing ground for all and competence should outshine wealth and economic status of an individual.

d The electoral bodies particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should engage more in youth political orientation. Independent National Electoral Commission should also put in place the right substantial mechanism through which youths can be motivated to come out and vote.

e The youths should replicate the youth network system adopted in the #EndSARS protest. With a leadership that is infused with the ideology of pursuing the unity and progress and the building of solid and accountable democratic conduct and practices in the Nigeria.

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