YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIZATION AND GOVERNANCE PROCESSES IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECT

Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen[1]

ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges and Prospects of Youth Participation in the Democratization and Governance Processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Using secondary sources and Liberal democratic theory as a framework of analysis. It has been discovered that despite various international communiqués to ensure increased participation of the vulnerable segments of the society in their national political process, Nigeria is still ranked among those countries with low Youth Participation as a result of corruption, monetization of Nigerian politics, the incessant discrediting of the youth by the elders. The finding also reveals youth have been used as political thugs in the electoral process by the political class. The study concludes youth participation in democracy and governance is critical but largely depends on the quality of the population of the youth. The study recommends that government should be coupled with a commitment to building long-term civic institutions that give youth a means of engaging political systems and actors beyond Elections.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, Participation, Policy Process, Youth.

Introduction

The importance of active youth participation in politics for the building of strong democracy has been the subject of much debate amongst scholars and policymakers in both developed and developing countries in recent years (Forbrig, 2005a; Forbrig, 2005b; Ismail, Olonisakin,

[1] Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen is of the Department of Political Science, Al-Qalam University, Katsina. Katsina State. Email: abdulrasheedabdulyakeen90@gmail.com

Picciotto and Wybrow, 2009; Boudarbat and Ajbilou, 2007; Sigudhla, 2004; Ben-Attar; 2010).). Surveys such as that conducted by the UNDP (2013), have shown that a fifth of the world's population is made up of predominantly young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years old. However, despite the overwhelming global youth population, scholars have observed that there is a decline and apathy in young people's participation in electoral processes, party membership and governance particularly in developing democracies (Apam, 2010; Abhuere, 2000; Afolayan, 2018). While these youth are often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, they are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments and many of them do not participate in elections (Kakwagh, V. and Ikwuba, 2010; Iberem, 2019).

Youths have constituted the most significant subcategory of growth in the Nigerian demography, since the early decades of the twentieth century. They have consistently accounted for over 60 per cent of the entire population (Afolayan, 2018). There is an aphorism that proclaims the youths as the "leaders of tomorrow". This ordinarily ought to brook no contradiction, in the contemplation of reality as governed by the natural laws of succession, in which one generation plays out its role and yields the stage for another, as a way of advancing the course of the human experience. In Nigeria, there appears the notion of a divine right to leadership, which transcends the categories of time, and persists among a coterie, a 'chosen' breed, even in the face of changing norms and times. After 1999, the bandwagon effects of the military regime in Nigeria reinvented the terms "political godfather" and "money bags". The people in this category have heavy financial weight to assert control over political parties through influencing the conduct of internal party elections and funding political parties and financing candidates in general elections. The processes of nominating these party candidates (godsons) for election displace the ordinary party member (Ibezim, 2019). Prior to the "not too young to run" bill in 2018, the provision for age eligibility to run for office did not favour youth. The major constraints also emanate from the socioeconomic and political system that prioritizes the financial status, party affiliation, and

educational qualifications of candidates. Even when youth meet the education requirements, the barrier remains the financial status and space in political parties to express and pursue political aspirations.

In Nigeria, voting starts at the age of 18; however, the age of eligibility to run for elective office varies for president (40), senate and governor (30), and the representative and state assembly (25). Amzat and Abdullah (2016). The monetization of the electoral processes has exacerbated the crisis of youth exclusion, which favours older, wealthier people or people with political sponsors funding them, the role of godfather and moneybag as well as the absence of internal party democracy leaves the control of political parties in the hands of older politicians at the expense of the youth, sadly, the government does not provide a platform for integration of youths in elective offices (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2019). While the 2010 electoral act of Nigeria, as amended in February 2022, drew a limit for campaign funds, it skipped limiting the excesses of political parties in the amounts they charged for nomination forms that shrink political space for youths. Since 2011, the cost of "expression of interest" and "nomination forms" of political parties, which is the pre-qualifying criterion for an electoral contest, has continued to rise beyond what many of the youths can afford, for the 2023 elections alone, the costs of the All Progressive Congress (APC) nomination forms and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) nomination forms were so exorbitant that it eliminated the dream of the youth to run for offices even with the 50 per cent discounts for young persons and women. Wealthy politicians can pay this money and transform the political space into a cash-and-carry enterprise. This activity results in a revolving door for corruption in political offices, with the push and pulls on the part of some overambitious youth, to succumb to crime to become rich, join the league of moneybags and begin to assert influence and power in the political system.

The All Progressive Congress (APC) pegged its presidential nomination form at one hundred million Naira (NGN100 million), as well as the inflated costs of running a political campaign for any elections in Nigeria with figures reported to be as high as one billion Naira to stage a moderate campaign. It's a brainer as to why elections

and contesting for elective positions are largely regarded as the exclusive reserve for wealthier, more connected individuals, many of whom fall into the older age demographic. Running for elections in Nigeria is not cheap, not by a long stretch. And with 45% of Nigerians living below the poverty line and another 23% at risk of slipping below the said line, you don't have to brainstorm heavily on why things are how they are Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2019).

According to (YIAGA Africa, 2019), youths in Nigeria had numerical superiority in the 2019 general elections with 51.11% of the roughly 43 million registered voters in the country. The actual elections were a different matter, however, with only about 46.3% of the total registered "youth" voters. A figure which added up to around 19 million. Regardless, this number was more than half the total voter turnout which stood at roughly 28.6 million with the actual youth voting bloc at about 66%. In the 2019 general elections, the youth bloc in Nigeria contributed to the largest number of voters (YIAGA Africa, 2019). When one looks at youth representation in leadership roles, it paints a completely different picture. According to (UNESCO (2010), define "youth" as "someone between the ages of 18-29" as per the National Youth Policy Organization, youth representation across the board is penned at 1%. With 1% of the leadership positions across all levels and tiers of governance in Nigeria, there's no way this trend paints a good look for an emerging economy like Nigeria in a world that is going largely digital. This is not an ageist opinion that seeks to sideline older citizens, but facts are what they are. There's no way a 1% representation of the most active members of the voting bloc and the majority citizen population makes any kind of sense.

There is a glaring fact of youth exclusion in Nigeria through structural, functional and constitutional means. Their participation (the youth) has remained at the "tokenism" level which portends several implications for the youth themselves and Nigeria as a country. This study highlights these problems, their implications and the solutions to addressing them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the challenges facing Africa today is how to provide opportunities for the continent's more than 200 million youths so that they can have decent lives and contribute to the socio-economic and political development of their countries (Iberem, 2019). According to the United Nations (2010), Africa's population as of 2011 was estimated at 1.05 billion and is expected to double by 2050. About 70 per cent of the African population is 30 years of age or younger. In Nigeria particularly, with over 70 million youth population (NBS, 2012) about 90 percent of this group which makes up the two-thirds majority of the population is not involved in decision-making and leadership of the country. Many are deterred by the bottlenecks like access to funding, unemployment (Ashiru, 2010; Omoju and Abraham, 2014; Udalla, 2011), issues of godfathers and exorbitant party nomination cards used as criteria to vie for elective posts (Omoju and Abraham, 2014). Growing awareness of political processes notwithstanding, the number of youth in active political institutions remains relatively small and even smaller is the youth actually given the mandate by their various parties to contest for elections. It is this small number of full-time politically active youth that interests the researcher because there is the distinct possibility that this group will continue to grow in numbers if given the opportunity and enabling laws to participate fully in governance.

Currently, although the three major political parties in the country: PDP, APC, and LP have well-developed youth wings, these are more or less like ceremonial offices as they are not really allowed or well-equipped to play prominent roles in decision-making through vying for elective posts. Since the transition to democracy in 1999, the number of youth in elective posts has not shown any significant improvement. This is a serious predicament and setback to true democracy which is against ostracizing any group in society from fully participating and becoming political actors. Thus, political parties must go beyond expressions of goodwill by establishing youth wings and be proactive to address the non-inclusion of politically active youth in decision-making. The present situation in the country is that the Nigerian political scene is manned by the same sit-tight and money-bag

politicians who have taken over the political scene and refused to allow politically active youth to contribute their quota to nation-building by playing prominent roles in governance (Okunna, 2020; Hilker and Fraser, 2009; Ubi, 2007). Youth political participation in decision-making in Nigeria can be described as a critical evaluation of the reasons behind the low number of youths in decision-making in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to assess the Challenges and Prospects of Youth Participation in the Democratization and Governance Processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Specifically, this study intends to achieve the following objectives:

i. To ascertain the impact of Youth Participation in the Democratization and Governance Processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.
ii. To examine the key challenges in achieving Youth Participation in the Democratization and Governance Processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.
iii. To proffer policy strategies needed to promote Youth Participation in the Democratization and Governance Processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Concept of Youth

Youth is one of the greatest assets any nation can be proud of. Not only are they legitimately regarded as future leaders, but young women and men are also potentially and actually the viral resources worth investment by a country, as well as the valued possession for national development. For instance, the United Nations (UN) (2011) for statistical consistency across regions defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 ad 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. According to Dalhatu (2012), the definition of youth varies not only across countries but across agencies. For instance, the World Bank opines the term "youth" refers to those

who are between the ages of 15 to 35. The Commonwealth Youth Programme works with young people aged 15-29 as youth. The definition by the World Bank is similar to the one adopted in the National Youth Policy of Nigeria. Youth is a term used for people of both genders, male and female, of young age. The term "youth" referred to individuals between the ages of 16-24 (Altschuler, Strangler, Berkley, & Burton 2009). According to Mohammed & Maikano (2011), the revised 1989 National Youth Policy in Nigeria defines the youth as somebody of between the ages of 12 and 30.

To synthesize, the concept of youth describes a person between late childhood and early adulthood, which represents the most productive time for persons with accompanying radical transformation. As such, it is a period that requires adequate supervision from elders to ensure proper socialization. If properly socialized, the youth' talents, labour, agility and energy, inventiveness and education can impact positively development and political participation. In Sub-Sahara Africa, according to UNESCO (2010), the youth constitute a major share of Africa's population (20,4% or close to 198 million people aged 15-24 years and over 30%, aged 15-35 years based on the definition used by the Africa Union (AU). Going by the 15-35 year definition of youth, the population of youth in Nigeria is even larger with youth constituting 38.1% (53, 552,331) of the population of the country.

Table 1: Youth Age across the Globe

Organization/Country	**Act**	**Youth Age**
United Nations		
Commonwealth	Commonwealth (2013)	**15-29**
China		
India	National Youth Policy of India (2014)	**15-29**
Singapore	National Youth Council Singapore	**15-35**
Indonesia	the Youth Law of Indonesia (2009)	**16-30**

Thailand	Thailand Youth Development Act (2007) and the Youth Development Plan (2012)	**18-25**
Malaysia	National Youth Development Policy (1997)	**15-40**
Africa	African Youth Charter	**15-35**
Uganda	National Youth Council Statue (1993)	**18-30**
Tanzania		
South Africa	National Youth Policy of South Africa (2009 – 2014)	**14-35**
Nigeria	Nigerian National Youth Policy	**18-35**

Compiled by the Author

DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

"Democracy" has enjoyed rare celebrity status in Western political thought and foreign policy rhetoric and practices since the fall of the Soviet Union. One vigorous voice asserted as follows: What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and universalization of Western Liberal Democracy as the form of human government (Fukuyama, 1992).

Fukuyama may have been inspired by the challenge of burying Karl Marx's prediction that Capitalism would collapse from its triumph in using technology to take over production from live human labour, while the triumph of an outraged proletariat would seize power to protect their survival and end the role of the state in human affairs. With the 2008 collapse of financial and not production-based capitalism, Fukuyama has been backtracking. Amartya Sen is quoted to have stated

that: While democracy is not yet universally practised or indeed universally accepted, in the general climate of world opinion democratic government has achieved the status of being taken to be generally right (Ikenberry, 2011).

In the world of today, democracy has become a popular concept in every contemporary discourse. It is now a word that resonates in people's minds and springs from their lips as they struggle for freedom and for a better way of life (Nelson, 2011). In its Greek understanding, the word "democracy" has a remote origin from the word demokratia (demos-the people, plus Kratia (from Kartos) - sway, authority) meaning the rule by the people. The impression this conveys is a form of government where the people directly decides by themselves without representation as we presently have today in most states of the world today (Wilson, 2000). The Oxford English dictionary in an attempt to convey the meaning of the concept defines democracy as:
1(a) Government of the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole and is exercised either directly or by them (as in the small republic of antiquity) or by an officer elected by them but in modern life often more vaguely denoting a social state in which all have equal rights without hereditary or arbitrary deference in rank or privilege; b) a state or community in which the government is vested in the people as a whole. (2) That class of people who have no hereditary of special rank or privilege; the common people (in reference to their political power).

Two great political philosophers, Pericles of Athen and Abraham Lincoln of America had made theoretical and practical demonstrations for an effective understanding of the concept of democracy in the political affairs of man: Government of the people by the people and for the people. In other words, it is a system of government where legitimacy is derived from the people through various processes, such as elections, participation in decision-making, etc. thus, democracy depends on the consolidation of legitimacy and the development of a political culture that supports the rule of the game. Diamond (1996) argued that democracy entails,

i. Meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and recognized groups, particularly political parties for effective positions of power, such as the executive and the legislature at regular intervals without the use of force.
ii. A high level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies through regular free and fair elections in such a way that no major group is excluded.
iii. A level of civil and political liberties (freedom of expression, press, association, etc) sufficient to ensure the integrity of the political competition.

From the definition provided above, it is apparent that democracy thrives in societies with active participation of the people in the political process. In Nigeria, the participation of the youth in the democratic process and governance is critical because they constitute a significant proportion of Nigeria's population. Participation includes voting during elections, popular consultations and participation at the level of policy formulation and implementation and holding elected officers accountable for their electoral promises (Bishop and Davis, 2003) defines political participation as those voluntary activities by members of a society through which they elect their leaders and representatives to executive and legislative levels respectively, directly or indirectly.

Thus, political participation varies. According to (Wilson, 2000), there is a small proportion of the elite that struggles for political power, while a large section of society is merely spectators that hardly participate beyond voting. In fact, data gathered from a post-election survey in Kano (Mohammed and Maikano, 2011) show that the overwhelming majority of the youth perceived participation in the democratic process as good and important. According to Mohammed and Maikano (2011), an overwhelming majority (87.4%) of the respondents covered agreed that it is important for people to participate in politics. While only 11.6% did not agree with the importance of people's participation in politics. This shows clearly that people hold and see much importance attached to political participation. Similarly,

the majority of the youth in the survey indicated that they voted during the 2011 elections. The data indicate the overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.5%) voted during the 2011 General Elections, while only an insignificant 15.9% did not vote. This, therefore, shows that people see voting as an important aspect of democracy, which is also supported by their ability and willingness to vote. This is very important because as people are willing to participate they also want their votes to count.

Youth, Political Participation, Education and Democracy

Political participation, according to Apam (2010), is a process by which individuals acting by themselves or through organized groups attempt to influence decision-making and influence the process of power sharing and its distribution. Over the years, youth in Nigeria has played an active role in the political process some of which are negative while many others are positive. For example, Apam (2010), claimed that the agitation by youth in 1962 against the Anglo-Nigeria Defense Pact, which tied Nigeria to the British military era after independence led to its arrogation. Similarly, there were agitations by youth in the early 1980s at the onset of the 1980s economic crises. Student movements launched and sustained campaigns for educational reforms. The youth also forged alliances with pro-democracy groups, trade unions and professional bodies to challenge unpopular states (Apam, 2010). These agitations were largely led by educated and enlightened youth in Nigeria.

Youth participation in democracy and governance is influenced by the quality of young people. According to UNESCO (2010), very often the formative years of African youth are characterized by exposure to deep-seated poverty, deficiencies in basic services, limited access to education, health care, opportunities for decent employment and poor governance and ongoing conflict and war, the consequence of which is that many youths have limited skills, knowledge and are poorly educated. Over the years, studies have linked education and support for participation in democracy. Accordingly, Van Morgan (2010) has argued that the more educated people are the more they

value democracy and participate in the democratic process. This is because education broadens the outlook and enables people to understand the need for the norms of tolerance and increases man's capacity to make rational electoral choices. In support of this, Van Morgan and Morgan (2010) confirmed a simple correlation between education and democracy, as well as the more complex causal assertion that education advances democratic governance.

The precise effect of education on democracy is difficult to ascertain. However, there is a link between schooling and political participation. This is particularly so because democracy is sustained by civil culture or pattern of attitude, which is often reinforced by education through civic engagement and thus support for a broad-based democratic regime (Glaeser et al 2007). Thus, according to Van Morga n and Morgan (2010), the educational level of a person is a moderately stronger predictor of the abstract support of democracy. For instance, 64.3% of people with no education support democracy while 68.6%, 72.5% and 76.7% with primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education support democracy, respectively. It is evident that with increasing levels of education, there is increasing support for democracy and encouragement for youth political participation.

THE EXCLUSION OF THE YOUTH FROM GOVERNANCE AND POLICY PROCESS

According to (Hilker and Fraser, 2009), exclusion describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against based on their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. It summarized these various forms of discrimination and exclusion as involving economic exclusion, political exclusion, social exclusion and cultural status. The importance of capacity in the progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into

account. Other scholars have also gone ahead to look at some factors affecting youth participation or reasons why the youth may not participate actively in societal activities and decisions. For Kelly (2008), it is a result of disparities in educational settings, economic disadvantages, and health disparities; which is more likely to occur in communities overcome by crime, drug dealing, and other indicators of diminished quality of life, where there is greater anonymity and suspicion among neighbours and less trust. Hoskins (2003) sees it from the role of the family in shaping youth political participation through teachings on democracy. While Almond (1966) identified culture as a determining factor of the political participation of citizens, Dudley (1973) believes it is institutional and electoral arrangements and party system, political leadership and socio-economic status.

What implications does the Exclusion of the Youth from the Governance and Policy Process have for Society? Scholars have argued that the exclusion of the youth from governance ad policy processes reeds violence emanating from the youth as a response to their exclusion (Hardiman, 2004; Hilker and Fraser, 2009; Ismail, Olonisakin, Picciotto and Wybrow, 2009; Boudarbat and Ajbilou, 2007; Sigudhla, 2004; Ben-Attar; 2010). Deriving from the foregoing, we find the need for youth exclusion in decisions and governance and thus, the focus of Africa in the last two decades of democratic experience.

It was the low involvement of youth in decision-making that prompted the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to inaugurate the Nigerian Youth Parliament (NYP), on August 25, 2008, shortly after his administration took over in 2007 (NYP, 2018). The central objective was to prepare the youth for the decision-making process while permitting them adequate representation in governance. Despite this laudable effort to engender more youth participation, the outcome of recent elections has shown that the goal of the NYP has not yielded the desired results. It is preposterous to note that from 2008 to date, the representation of youth has not risen to any appreciable level. It is, therefore, not surprising that many Nigerian youths genuinely can no longer find the courage to dream and aspire. Similarly, the government has failed to ensure that the youth live "in a safe and secure

environment." In terms of safety and security, Nigeria is one of the most unsafe, insecure and dangerous places to live in the entire world "Nigeria is ranked 3rd as the most terrorized country globally, behind Afghanistan and Iraq (and) it is being speculated that we will soon overtake them" (Obi, 2020). Insecurity is not new in Nigeria and has been getting progressively worse over the years, as generally exemplified by: Terrorism and wanton destruction of lives and property in the North-Eastern part of the country by Boko Haram, leading to what the United Nations (UN) in March 2017 described as the worst humanitarian crisis since the creation of the UN, as hundreds of thousands of people who survived the crisis are on the verge of starving to death. The situation has deteriorated since 2017 and has become quite horrifying. Militancy and insurgency in the Niger Delta region of the country. Rise of separatist groups, mainly in the Southern parts of the country, clamouring for independence/secession for their regions. Menace of rampaging herdsmen wreaking havoc on lives and property in several parts of the country. All manner of ethnic and religious crises are creating fear and distrust among Nigerians, thus fueling the clamour for the re-structuring of the country, and even a breakup of Nigeria. Okunna (2020).

Okunna (2020). goes on to present a catalogue of criminal activities in the country which comprise a wide range of violent crimes including armed robbery, assault, burglary, carjacking, rape, kidnapping, extortion, fraud, civil unrest, maritime crime, periodic outbreaks of violence among localized street gangs, multiple armed criminal elements ranging from low level to organized syndicates, cultist or gang violence which often erupts in supremacy battles between various groups, cybercrime which is becoming more sophisticated etc.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter adopts liberal democratic theory as a framework of analysis. Liberal democracy, according to Menke (2004), is individual-endorsed control of governance and rule over all by vested and newborn elites, derived from the mobilization of existing allegiance or

induced consent. It authorizes control of collective assets and command of the destiny of society through individualized electoral processes, based on the tenet that a society can be represented fairly by the aggregate of its individuals and the arithmetic sum of their votes.

In classical liberal theory, the political individual is conceptualized as a rational, autonomous being. According to Miron and Dhillon (2004), the democratic liberal theory has typically been concerned with making explicit the maximum rights and freedoms guaranteed to a public within the limits of a democratic state. They further stated that; Education plays a key role within this understanding for two basic reasons: (a) individuals have to be educated to participate fully in a liberal-democratic state; and (b) individuals need to know what their rights and obligations are to ensure the smooth functioning and well-being of such a state. The relationship between democracy and liberalism has been controversial since the beginning of the 19th century. The ideology of liberalism is highly individualistic and concerns itself with limiting the power of the state over the individual. Its common teaching is based on the assumption that individuals are mostly motivated by self-interest rather than any conception of the common good. Thus, a fear that self-interested individuals, even if they are in the majority, may turn public power to private advantage brings about the need for a set of constitutional stipulations to protect individuals against the government, and against each other, the democrats believed. In contrast, democracy is concerned with empowering the masses and leadership based on the wishes of the majority of the people. There was the fear among liberals that unrestrained and unguided masses would trample on the rights of individuals. Mill (1991), who was one of the democratic liberals called for the protection of the individual against the 'tyranny of the majority'. Thus, liberal democracy may be seen as a compromise between liberal individualism and democratic collectivism.

This kind of democracy creates ideological misconceptions by setting representative institutions which though pretending to work for all are actually working for the dominant class. The poorly educated masses are susceptible to distorted facts and capitalist propaganda

through the government-controlled press. It pays lip service to the sovereignty of the people to make itself legitimate thus maintaining and serving the bourgeois social order; but since everyone regards such order as natural and proper and thus accepts their place within it, everyone then sees the state, in working this way as representing the people and acting on their behalf. Moreover, public choices are meant to serve the interest of the elites. The elites being rational and self-interested use the resources of the state at their disposal to maintain order in the society by managing a consensus that represents their interest which is aimed at maintaining the status quo. The elites in government try to structure the debate to quash any problem that would threaten their hold on power. This they achieve through elite repression of forced indoctrination in "political correctness", limitations on dissent, speech and assembly in the name of law and order; and the subversion of democratic values in a paradoxical effort to preserve the system.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach to the research methodology was used in this study. In order to probe, scrutinize, explore, and analyze the study's facts, secondary data is included in this study. As a result, the information was gathered from pertinent publications, newspaper articles, reports from international organizations, and research articles. In this study, the collected data is analyzed to ascertain the impact of Youth Participation in the Democratization and Governance Processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

THE NATURE AND MEANS OF YOUTH EXCLUSION FROM GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Policy-making for youth development is not new in Nigeria; neither have youth development programmes and activities been absent. The exclusion of youth from active participation in the Nigerian body polity manifests in various dimensions. They have been made possible through constitutional dictates, psychological; manipulations, sociological relations and others. These are discussed below.

First, the constitutional provision on age qualification for contesting a political post in Nigeria is the most paramount avenue of excluding the youth. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (which has often come under serious criticism for not having been made by the citizens and not representing the wishes and aspirations of the citizens) provides that a person shall be eligible for the office of Governor if:

(i) He or she is a citizen of Nigeria by birth (ii) he has attained the age of 35 years (iii) he is a member of a political party and is sponsored by that political party, and (iv) He or she has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent.

The same above stipulations apply to members of the Senate. Also, the highest position in the country, the President, has to be contested by persons who are up to the age of 40 and above. It is only the House of Representatives and State Assembly positions that can be contested by persons who have attained the age of 30 and above (see Sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). On the other hand, the National Youth Policy of Nigeria defines a youth as a person between the age brackets of 18 to 35. The implication of this is that for one to vie for the office of the Governor he must have overgrown the age of youth and even when one wants to contest for the House of Representatives or State Assembly position, other factors like financial inadequacy becomes a barrier. Thus, the youth hardly hold elective posts in Nigeria. The monetization of electoral and political processes in the country, the high cost of nomination and expression of interest fees charged by political parties will corrupt politics and make politics a do-or-die exercise. Monetization of our politics does not make any sense, more so that the country is faced with the problem of 'vote buying' that rightly was noted during the 2022 gubernatorial election in Ekiti State. Thus, the high cost of nomination fees by the political parties will only add more salt to the wound; the moneybags and godfathers are likely to hijack the political process (Abdulyakeen, 2021). The high cost of nomination and

expression of interest forms by two main political parties is a challenge to democratic governance in Nigeria. Political parties charge millions of naira for nomination and expression of interest forms. High nomination fee implies that only a few who have the money carries the day, and this situation is likely to promote corruption and scuttle the nation's effort at democratic consolidation. For a person to aspire to be a presidential aspirant of APC, the person has to doll out 45 million, the fees for governorship aspirants at N22.5 million, senate N7 million, Reps 3.85, state assembly N850, 000; in addition, the female and physically challenged aspirants will pay 50 per cent of the prescribed fees, for each position. The PDP for one to aspire for president, the person is to pay N12 million, governorship, 6N million, Reps N2.5 million and State House of Assembly, N600, 000 (Ibezim, 2019).

Secondly, the level of monetization of Nigerian politics where only the rich participate by vying for elective posts places a very high hurdle before the Nigerian youth as far as contesting political posts in the country is concerned. With the rate of unemployment and the state of the Nigerian economy, where many youths hardly find jobs after school, it becomes very hard for them to fit into the political arena. The result is that before they could get enough money to participate, they must have grown out of the youth age bracket.

Thirdly, the youth in Nigeria have been psychologically and sociologically twisted into believing that leadership in Nigeria is not meant for them but for adults. The perception and address of the youth as "leaders of tomorrow" is the case in question here. This has made the youth totally disengage from active participation in politics at the gladiatorial level. According to Kukah (1999), "youth everywhere are occasionally lullabied by such concepts as leaders of tomorrow, reassures/owners of the future, as a means of firing them to higher dreams and idealism, but here in Nigeria, cynicism has become so deep that they seem to have also disengaged from the nation-state. Talk of the need for the cultivation of keen interest in such aspects of national life like politics, civics, governance, leadership, which should serve as the forum for some form of training for our youth, only draws a skeptical yawn from them". According to Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010)

the traditional slogan of "youth are the future" fails to take to account that youth are very active contributors to their societies today.

Fourthly and closely related to the above is the incessant discrediting of the youth by the elders and labelling them "incapable of ruling" in other to make way for themselves to continue taking turns in occupying the political positions in the country both in elected and non-elected positions (Iberem, 2019). While youths have been observed as being the dominant demography in the Nigerian electoral process, constituting over 50 per cent of registered voters in the country (YIAGA Africa, 2018), and being highly instrumental to political change, nevertheless various factors have restricted their political participation in the past decades. Besides being a sizeable voting bloc, they are still largely precluded from participating directly in the decision-making processes that come with political representation. They are the voters whom the system in place does not allow to be voted for, due to various restrictions they have encountered, from legal and political structures. In addition, they are excluded as significant beneficiaries of political decision-making, as their concerns are never the primary considerations of the political elite, after being voted into power. The marginalization and limited political participation of the Nigerian youth are evident in the facts that since the return of democracy to the country in 1999, referred to as the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the cabinets at the federal level have not been "youth-friendly". Most of the members of the Federal Executive Councils have been older politicians, who had served in government in one form or another since the 1970s. The average age in the cabinets has been 50, with other members being in their 60s, and some in their 70s. Also, it has been noted that from 1999 to 2016, no Minister for Youth has been a youth (Amzat and Abdullahi, 2016).

Despite having a National Youth Policy that lays out a very bold vision for harnessing the potential of youths, and signposts how the strategy could be built for empowering the demography to make far-reaching contributions to national development, no concrete role has been designed for youths to attain political power. A number of the key factors hindering the political participation of youths have included

poverty, resulting from the failure of the state to attend to the welfare of the people, which is the primary purpose of government. As such, the lack of adequate social provisioning for education, health and decent housing has put the youth at the disadvantage of being fundamentally distracted by existential issues.

Fifthly, Nigerian democracy in the past 20 years has generally produced unaccountable leaders, which was orchestrated by massive election, rigging resulting in the votes of the electorates never being relevant. Corruption (both elected and appointed) has been the order of the day. The frustration that this situation has instilled in the Nigerian electorate has also led to total despair over their relevance in the country. The resultant action in the past became a total disconnection between the leaders and the people since the leaders pay deaf ears to the demands of the electorate. Based on this, many youths fail to see a connection between participation in politics and the impact that politics has on their daily lives. They have resorted to fate and time for them to have their way.

Many of the youth who are desperate to be rich and also participate in politics end up being willing instruments in the hands of politicians as political thugs. Since many a politician in Nigeria employs the services of thugs to pursue their political ambitions, the outcome is incessant political clashes and violence among the different groups and parties as well as what Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) while Amzat and Abdullahi (2016) described as "street youth". Muhammed (n.d) has given an account of youth involvement in violence in Nigeria which political fanaticism and religious fanaticism which have most times had a political undertone are the highest contributing variables. Even the Niger Delta struggles, aside from human rights issues, cannot be totally separated from political interests.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXCLUSION OF THE YOUTH FROM NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENTAL DEMOCRACY

The youth is one of the greatest assets any nation can have. They are often the drivers and harbingers for transformative social change in well-organized societies…. Not surprisingly, the youth are legitimately

regarded not only as future leaders but also as the bulwark for a country whose growth and prosperity are inextricably connected to youth development. Therefore, it is safe to say that a country with no youth would have no future (African Heritage Institution, 2020). It was Kofi Anna (in Afolayan, 2018) who once asserted that:

No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death".

> Young exclusion from governance and policy process is fundamentally a human rights violation UNESCO (2010) his is also in congruence with the liberal democratic principle of human freedom and the right to participation. Again, the World Youth Report, 2005 states that "youth inclusion strengthens their commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy." Thus, when the youth are involved and allowed the freedom to exercise their rights, they in turn, knowing that such principle exists and is implementable, will also thread such part when they rise to positions of authority. But when this is neglected, society should expect to produce youth who is no respecter of human rights.

Basically, the older politicians neglect the contribution of youth in decision making and nation-building (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Forbrig, 2005b; O'Donoghue et al., 2002) this can have adverse effects on the polity in the long run if adequate steps are not taken to correct this phenomenon. The issue of low youth participation in politics in the country became very serious and critical in the build-up to the 2015 general elections and post-election. Just like in the previous elections, despite all promises made before the elections, there was no equitable representation of the youth in the national parliament. And the subsequent appointment of ministers by the Buhari-led government did not see any youth emerge. This is viewed by majority of the youth as a major setback to the nascent democracy and reneging on the pre-election agreement. This led to the Youth Leader for the ruling party,

All Progressive Congress (APC), Dasuki Jalo, blaming the president for failure to carry youth along in his administration thereby perpetuating the era of 'use and dump' of the youth in politics (Nwabughiogu, 2015). The All Progressive Congress (APC), the party which won the 2015 general election with massive support from the youth, had before the election promised a fair inclusion of youth in the administration. This is a party that fronts 'Social Democracy Change' as its ideology. Despite this, the nation once more is witnessing the youth being ostracized from political involvement and being elected into the political post of their choice and the sit-tight attitude of politicians has led to the constant recycling of political leaders. The long-promised pact to allow credible, capable youth was not realized. The youth with the numerical strength that should give them the necessary leverage to be adequately represented in governance, view this as social injustice. More so, the youth known for their vibrancy, energy and radical approach to issues will bring in the needed impetus to transform the political scenery of the nation. Therefore, the difficulties in active youth participation in decision making at the highest echelon of governance need to be eliminated for effective and adequate representation of youth as well as the holistic transformation of the nation. This study as a result is geared to explore this gap and come up with practical solutions that will boost more youth participation in decision-making.

Secondly, involvement is a characteristic of development and youth participation helps to develop the youth and prepare them for present and future developmental activities. Youth who learn early to deal with democratic values and human rights will later contribute as active citizens to build up stable democratic and peaceful structures in their countries. The promotion of youth participation is thus of utmost importance to enhance good governance and avoid apathy in politics. The youth are vehicles of and central to development as their energy, motivation and creative thought patterns have a lot to offer to any society and state at large. Any nation or state that decides to separate itself from its youth actually has no dream for sustained development. Sen (1999) as cited by UNICEF (2001) believes that participation is central to the developmental approach, for several reasons. He posited

that participation itself is development, in that development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy.

The quality of education is collapsing in Nigeria at all levels, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels whose 'constituencies' are the youth (aged 15-29 years, as delineated in the Youth Policy). Teaching and learning facilities in tertiary educational institutions have been abysmal because the government has not shown enough concern for youth education. Over the years, this has led to agitations by various unions in tertiary institutions, as exemplified by the protracted incessant strike action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

Funding has equally been abysmal for the Education Sector, thus making it impossible to achieve quality education, capacity-building and skills development for youths. This can be seen from the percentages of Federal Government Budgets allocated to the Education Sector over the years (Olufemi, 2020): 2011 = 9.3%; 2012 = 9.86% 2013 = 9.01% 2014 = 10.5% 2015 = 10.7% 2016 = 7.9% 2017 = 7.4% 2018 = 7.04% 2019 = 7.05% 2020 = 6.7% 2021 = 5.6%. In terms of providing adequate opportunities for productive employment/employment creation and successful entrepreneurship" for the Nigerian youth, the government has also failed. The level of unemployment and under-employment in Nigeria is staggering. This is particularly true of the youth, many of whom are well-educated and skilled. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) show that:

The overall unemployment rate in the country is as high as 27.1%. The number of youths who are eligible to work is 40 million, out of which only 14.7 million are fully employed. This is a very worrisome situation. Even more worrisome is the fact that the government, having failed in employment creation for Nigerian youths, has equally failed to create the enabling environment for the youth to create employment for themselves by engaging in successful entrepreneurship, particularly through Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) which are acknowledged globally as the engine of economic growth and development, particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. One great advantage of MSMEs lies in their capacity to empower young

entrepreneurs and boost desperately-needed employment in the face of the staggering level of youth unemployment in the country today. In this respect, Obi's (2017) advice to the Federal Government, in its search for solutions to the country's economic problems, has become even more relevant. The current situation of a terribly high level of youth unemployment is very worrisome because a "high youth unemployment rate is synonymous with increased insecurity and poverty, a situation that is also seen as a ticking time bomb" (nairametrics.com). This scenario is not just worrisome; it is terrifying in the face of the current level of poverty in Nigeria

The reality and true significance of the #EndSARS Protest has finally dawned on Nigerians and the global community – #EndSARS was not just a protest against police brutality but a desperate lashing out by the Nigerian youth against a long history of government's failures to make Nigeria a livable society generally and to achieve genuine youth development in particular. In appraising these failures over the years, let us look at some of the ramifications of the 2019 Youth Policy in terms of its Vision and Strategic Thrusts (as a reflection of the 2009 Youth Policy and previous youth development programmes) to assess the efforts of the government to make Nigeria an environment in which the youth can live and thrive.

According to UNICEF (2001):

The community can be considered developed to the extent that it ensures that its entire people, including adolescents, are in a position to participate and shape a life of dignity. At the same time, participation is also the means to self-development. Adolescents and their communities do not develop by being passive by simply observing or being told the key truths of development. Through participation, adolescents develop skills, build competencies, form aspirations, gain confidence and attain valuable resources.

Seibou et al (2005) have also give a good picture of the reason why the youth should be included and not excluded. Relating the work of Hart (1997) who developed a widely used conceptual model for youth participation called the "Ladder of Participation," (Seibou et al, 2005) states that "Children need to be involved in meaningful projects

with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved." With participation, he says, young people can learn to be responsible citizens." To learn these responsibilities, children need to engage in collaborative activities with other persons, including those who are older and more experienced than themselves. Thus, when the youth are excluded, they are underdeveloped.

Furthermore, youth participation presents them with the opportunity of appreciating democracy, responsibility and ownership. Political participation in adulthood is largely determined by participation in youth. The youth, when not excluded but participate in societal and state activities, develop the "we" feeling and so co-operate with people around him putting all his energy and intellect, not excluding material resources, towards the progress and preservation of such society; otherwise they tend to engage in different forms of violence and no meaningful development can be achieved in a state of violence and crises. Research has shown that youth disconnected from pro-social community activities for more than 2 years are more likely to engage in juvenile delinquency activities (Kelly, 2006; Ubi, 2007; Hardima, 2004 in Hoskis, 2003). Further, these youth are less likely to engage in public decisions concerning the community and more likely to exhibit social withdrawal and experience overt exclusion from pro-social community activities (Kelly, 2006; Ubi, 2007; Hardima, 2004 in Hoskis, 2003). Hoskins added that with greater anonymity and suspicion, there is a greater likelihood that social mistrust and disconnectedness increase. The above findings are not indifferent to political participation as the youth in Nigeria have developed serious apathy to politics which is not unconnected with the exclusion they have suffered over a decade of Nigeria's democracy. This has made them good instruments of violence in the hands of the elite.

More so, poverty and a high percentage of youth unemployment are among the biggest challenges for developing countries like Nigeria. Developing countries of Africa, to which Nigeria belongs, have made efforts through policy formulation aimed at reducing unemployment.

But these policies always seem to fail as unemployment rates keep increasing. According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, (2020), the unemployment rate was highest for young people aged 15-24 (normally defined as youths by international standards) at 34.2% about 3 times the global unemployment rate for youths estimated at about 12% and sub-Saharan African average rate of also about 12%. Most times, the youth who are the most affected group, are not involved in formulating policies concerning unemployment. The result is that these policies do not suit the condition of the youth and the existing situation. This makes it vital to involve the youth in policy development and implementation as they are experts on their life situation and their exclusion most of the times, makes policies targeted at solving their problems fail.

Again, when the youth are excluded from policy making and implementation, it is often the case that their interest is either not considered or less considered in the policy process. The result is that policies don't reflect the interests of the youth (since the parliament or law makers including the executives are all adults), but rather tend to favour adults most and even when they make policies targeted at the youth, such policies are misdirected or wrongly implemented. The Standpoint theorists have argued that the weaker group and the group affected by a problem are in a better position to explain such problems and give a clearer picture of issues surrounding it or that marginalized people provide less false views of the world than do the privileged perspectives of the powerful (Udalla, 2011). The outcome is policies benefitting the old. When the youth are part of policy making, they stand the better chance of making sure that policies put their interests into adequate consideration.

Finally is the danger of the adults not being able to know the capacity and capability of the youth when they are not tried through involvement. Most of the time, adults exclude the youth from societal and state activities for the reason that they are not competent enough to be given responsibilities just as we have discussed above. But, the truth is that when one is never put to test, the capability of such a person is hardly ascertained. It is even more problematic when the youth are excluded under the guise of incapability because as it denies such youth

the opportunity to discover their weaknesses and build better capacity. As a result of this, such youth continue to wallow in ignorance and backwardness. It must be noted here, however, that when the youth are being underdeveloped, the whole society and state at large, are also being underdeveloped.

For effective youth development, the Nigerian youth should be living in an environment that guarantees them "freedom from abuse, violence, intimidation….". As is the case with the other Strategic Thrusts of Nigeria's youth development policies and progammes, the government has failed to safeguard its youth from abuse, violence and intimidation. This failure is best summarized with the question: If there was "freedom from abuse, violence [and] intimidation" for the Nigerian youth and if they were "living in a safe and secure environment", would the #EndSARS Protest have happened? As stated earlier, #EndSARS began basically as a protest against police abuse, violence, intimidation and brutality. Similarly, as extensively discussed above, safety and security have progressively worsened in recent times, to the point where Nigeria is now one of the most unsafe, insecure and dangerous places to live in globally; it is therefore not surprising that the country has become the most stressful country to live in ranked 148 out of 150 (Obi, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our analysis has categorically shown in this work that the youths in Nigeria are excluded from the governance and policy process. Young people play vital parts in ensuring that they bring change to their society. This they do by political participation through the formulation of political parties, vying for political offices as well as voting for others who contest elective positions. However, political engagements depend on the socio-economic and political climate in which politics is played. In Nigeria, politics is expensive, and the majority of the youths are poor. Quite a number of them are hostile due to the culture of violence which has characterized the system over the years. Equally, the dominance of the ruling and political class whom they often re-cycled has all affected youth political engagements in Nigeria in no small measure. Having

demonstrated that the youth in Nigeria are actually excluded from active politics and policy-making framework, this work will be considered incomplete without suggesting ways through which the youth can be fully involved in the societal and state decisions.

i. The involvement of youth in politics should go beyond the periphery that is, voting only and serving as political thugs.
ii. The government should also continuously give subversions to youth bodies especially national ones like the National Youth Council so that they can carry out development and capacity-building programs for its members. It will also reduce the vulnerability of the youth and their leaders and discourage them from being easily bought over by politicians.
iii. Young people should be encouraged to register to vote and join political parties and other organs of institutional politics, but these efforts should be coupled with a commitment to building long-term civic institutions that give youths a means of engaging political systems and actors beyond Election Day.
iv. More civic participation by youths will not guarantee better governance outcomes, but it does raise the odds of bridging the significant gap between those deciding policy and those who have to weather its effects. And that is a useful point of departure.
v. Conscious efforts should be made to inculcate into the youth respect for merit, hard work and honesty. This is because of lack of self-value due to extreme poverty and ignorance is counterproductive to democracy.

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