

Youth and Political Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: The Trends, Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT: Inequality has not only persevered in Nigeria but in many instances deepened with large number of people, including the youth excluded from full involvement in economic, social and political life. Despite the gargantuan roles played by Nigerian youths during and after the independence struggle, they have been tactically barred from active political participation. Popular participation which entails active participation of all in governance is very essential for the sustenance of democracy. The objectives of the study include, to analyze the trends, challenges and opportunities for youth and political entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The study was essentially a library researched work. Secondary data was derived through textbook, journals, seminar papers, official bulletins, newspapers, magazines and internet sources. Data was analysed using content analysis, narrative report and descriptive essay. The study concludes that quota system should be adopted in order to encourage youth's active participation in politics and governance. The Government should also make conscious effort to reduce drastically the cost of nomination forms and politicking in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, Representation, Insecurity, Politics, Popular Participation

1. Introduction

Nigerian's youths played pivotal roles in pre – independence era. They were at the fore front of the independence struggle in Nigeria. They fought and won Nigeria's independence in 1960 through their active use of mass media, initiation and participation in constitutional conferences and their active participation in electoral politics. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) formed in 1934 by Nigerian youths transformed into a political party in 1938 and contested elections into the Lagos Town Council discomposing Herbert Macaulay's Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP). The party also encouraged the emergence of other political parties in Nigeria that were also led by the youths such as the Action Group (AG) in 1950, The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in 1950, The National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944. Anthony Enahoro, at 30, moved the motion for Nigeria's independence in 1953. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a youth, aged 34 years, through his newspaper, West African pilot, launched in 1937, was devoted in fighting and in aiding the attainment of Nigeria's independence. After independence, Nigerian youths also dominated the political space as active participants in electoral politics including standing as candidates in election and winning elections into different offices. The first Nigerian coup which took place in 1966, was executed by a youth, Kaduna Nzeogwu, who was 29yrs. The counter coup that followed thereafter was by youths and power was given to a youth of about 30 years known as General Yakubu Gowon in 1966. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Youth Charter recognised youths as those within the ages of 15 – 35 years. The United Nations sees youths as people within the ages of 15 – 24 years. Whereas in Nigeria, the National Youth Policy 2009, considers youths as people within the ages of 18 – 35 years. The plight of the youth has also received global attention. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced its

first youth programme 2014 – 2017 tagged “Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future (1). The UNDP also inaugurated a youth global programme for sustainable development and peace – youth (2016 – 2020).

Since 1979, Nigerian youths are noted to have been confined to the youth wing of political parties. This was occasioned by the sit – tight syndrome of the First Republic (1960 – 1966) politicians, who refused to leave the stage for the youths. Nigerian youths constitute about 40% of the entire population, which indicates one of the highest youth bulges in the world (2) and constitute about 211,400,708 members (3). Nigerian’s youths constitute about 67% of Nigeria’s voters. But sadly, this high population is not well utilized to their favour in electoral politics. The youths are rather used as instruments to undermine political processes. They feature as ballot box snatchers, supporters of god fathers as thugs, who intimidate their god father’s opponents. They maim and kill people; they also destroy properties. Despite the fact that Nigerian’s youth dominate as registered voters, they are tactically debarred from standing as candidates in election. Politics is characteristically regarded as a space meant for men that are politically experienced. The political space is still largely dominated by the old generation god fathers who kept recycling themselves. Mr Chungong, the Secretary General of Inter – Parliamentary Union (IPU) rightly points out that globally 1.9% of parliamentarians are youth and that the percentage in Africa is even lower due to high requirement age into elective positions. Arguing further, he observes that despite the high population rate of youths in Africa, they do not have concrete plans concerning youth empowerment, which he noted is of great concern, as it depicts the high marginalization of youths in the continent (4).

Corruption has perverted the polity and politics is now seen as business and no longer as an opportunity to serve. This has ensured that stakes are so high that one needs a godfather before one is endorsed by any political party. Godfather’s hardly favour the selection of youths. Democracy is acknowledged widely as the best form of government in the world today. Democracy is government in which civic responsibilities and power are carried out or exercised by all citizens directly or through their elected representatives. Some of the attributes of democracy that has endeared it to many include popular participation, legitimacy, periodic election and existence of constitution. Popular participation is the active involvement of all citizens in the social and political activities of a country. Popular participation is known to be a sine -qua non to democracy, where every eligible adult is expected to participate actively in political processes. Nigeria cannot be seen as practising democracy when the youths, with their large size, are tactically disenfranchised from contesting or standing as candidates in election. There are two essential modes of popular participation. One is the conventional or institutional participation and the unconventional participation. The conventional or institutional participation limits participation within established political institutions while unconventional participation is a head on action outside institutions and confrontation of the political elites. As noted earlier, Nigerian youths have been tactically excluded from standing as candidates in elections. The youths rather feature as unconventional participants through protesting against what they perceive as unjust laws against them. They operate outside political institutions as activists and protesters. Inclusion of passionate youths in politics will encourage rapid growth and development of the economy due to their vibrancy. It will be a good way to maximally utilize and channel their energy to activities that will fully benefit the country. Cultivating synergies between the youths and older adults will produce a much higher dividend for the country. It will also engender a sense of belonging in them. It is against this background that this paper is interested in analysing the trends, challenges and opportunities of youth political entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The Participatory Democratic Theory will be explored for this study. The research was essentially a library oriented one. Data was analysed using content analysis, narrative report and descriptive essay.

2. Theoretical Underpinning

The theory of Participatory Democracy will be explored. The major theorists of Participatory Democracy includes Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 - 1778) and Robert Michels (1876 - 1936). Participatory Democracy tends to emphasize greater citizen participation and more direct representation than traditional representative democracy. It entails more than consent or regular and periodic election. It signifies active and substantial engagement of the citizens in the governing processes (5). It also stressed the responsibility of the citizen as an enthusiastic person in self-legislation and a real shareholder in governance. It sees equal participation of all groups in the country in the political processes as the main ingredient of legitimacy. This

contradicts representative democracy in which the citizens depend on their elected representative to act on their behalf, thereby a passive client of the government. Jean Jacques Rousseau and Robert Michels argue that representation tend to nullify the core meaning of democratic principle. As it encourages people to elect representatives rather than be active participants themselves. This theory is relevant to this work as it emphasizes on active and substantial engagement of all in governing processes. Nigerian youths do not participate actively in conventional or in institutional capacity. They rely majorly on elected recycled old leaders as their representatives. These recycled men rule as elites and the laws and policies they make are reflections of their values and preferences.

3. Conceptual Clarification

Popular Participation

Popular participation is a process whereby majority of citizens in a country are interested in featuring in the affairs and decision making of the country. It emphasizes that decisions are made in the interest of the majority. There are three types of popular participation, they are: political popular participation, social popular participation and religious popular participation. For the purpose of this study, popular participation will only be considered as holding of public office and contesting elections. Nigerian youths are active on all other forms of political participation except these two.

4. Overview of the Trend of Youth Political Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

Nigeria's First Republic was between 1960- 1966. The rulers ruled as premiers representing their regions between 1960 - 1963. There was Obafemi Awolowo representing the Western region, Ahmadu Bello for Northern region, Michael Okpara for Eastern Region and Dennis Osadebay for Mid-western Nigeria. These men were all at the forefront of the fight for Nigeria's independence. They formed political parties like the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1934, in 1944, the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroun (NCNC), in 1950, the Action Group (AG), in 1950, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), in 1949, the Northern People's Congress (NPC). Most of the First Republican parties emerged from youth movements who fought for the country's independence. NEPU was formed by Aminu Kano, at the age of 30, Isaac Adaka Boro was in his late twenties when he founded the Niger Delta Volunteer Force in 1966.

After independence, the youths that fought for independence dominated and emerged as leaders after their victory at elections. The coup and counter coup of 1966 were also led by youths. After the coup, General Gowon, a youth in his early thirties, emerged as the Head of State. He led Nigeria through a 30 months civil war with the Biafran Republic forces. Under his leadership, the Nigerian side won and the country was preserved as one united country. Former Presidents, Generals Obasanjo and Gowon were youths, who were in their thirties, and did their best to ensure the country develop politically, economically and socially. In 1979, which ushered in the Second Republic, youth active participation in Nigeria began to wane down. The politicians on board, were First Republican politicians, who refused to give way for the youths. The youths were confined as supporters of the politicians and they were active only as youth members of political parties. The youths were used for rigging of the 1983 election and this later culminated to the collapse of the Second Republic. Some youths were at this stage at the front burner of protest against the repressive governments of Generals Babangida and Abacha. The high unemployment rate which stemmed from the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), made the youths to succumb to pressure by the political class to be used as instruments of brutality against their political opponents in exchange for monetary reward.

Since the introduction of democracy and ushering in of the Fourth Republic (1999 till date), the situation has not improved. Recycled old politicians have continued to dominate the political space. No youth has ever emerged as a member of the Federal Executive Council. The age range of Ministers is between 50 – 70 years. A youth has never been appointed as a Minister of Youth and the current Minister of Youth is 56 years. Therefore, the public policies made in the country have not taken into consideration the values and concerns of the youth. This stems from the fact that they do not participate directly in decision making processes. The Nigerian National Assemblies are also dominated by older politicians between the ages of 50 – 70 years. Youth exclusion in governance in Nigeria has encouraged increased restiveness by the youth since the inception of

the Fourth Republic. It has manifested as Niger Delta militias, where youths are involved in pipe line vandalisation and stealing of crude oil. Between January to September 2021, Nigeria is noted to have lost N898.93bn (equivalent of \$2,094bn) to crude oil loss and pipe line vandalisation (6). Fulani banditry, violent attacks and kidnapping for ransom have also become rampant. These have led to insecurity of lives and have equally led to the death of many citizens. The Nigerian Government created the National Youth Development Policy to champion youth development. The policy sees youth welfare to be crucial to the socio – economic development of the country. In 2007, The Federal Ministry of Youth Development was created to encourage youths to be self - reliant and responsible. The Ministry is responsible for funding youth activities and programmes. It targets some priority areas which include peace building, education, health, agriculture, HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. In 2016, several civil society organizations including Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA Africa) pushed for the signing of The Age Reduction Bill also known as Not Too Young to Run Bill.

The bill was put together by the efforts of about 40 youth - based initiatives. The bill solicits for adjustment of the age for running of elective positions for the Senate and Governor from 35 years to 30 years, House of Representative and House of Assembly, from 30 years to 25 years and the President from 40 to 30 years through constitutional amendments. On 31st May 2018, the bill was signed by the President. Though, according to the President, the age for the running of elective positions for the Governor and Senators were not reduced (7). In 2019, a year after the passage of the bill, not much changed in the political fortune of the Nigerian youths. The 2019 election is noted to be one of the most contested election since 1999. This is arguably because of the passage of Not Too Young to Run Bill. There were 73 Presidential candidates, 1,904 Senate candidates, 14, 583 State House of Assemblies and 1, 066 Governorship candidates. 14% of Presidential candidates were between 35 – 40 years and 23% of youths contested as National Assemblies candidates (8). One of the positive outcomes of the Not Too Young Bill include the determination of the youths to contest for the 2019 election. To this end, they formed political parties such as the Alliance for New Nigeria (ANN). YIAGA Africa, a youth organization solicited for the reduction of nomination forms fees so as to encourage the participation of youths (9). 27.4% of all the candidates that contested for seats in the House of Representatives in 2019, were youths as against 18% at the 2015 general elections (8). The youth still did not fare well at the polls. After the 2019 election, out of the 991 seats in 36 Houses of Assembly, only 22 members, ages between 25 – 30 years are direct beneficiaries of the Not too Young to Run Act, representing a paltry 2.2%. At the House of Representatives, out of 360 members, only 12 members are between 30 – 35 years, representing 3.3%.

5. Challenges or Factors Affecting Youth Political Participation

1.1.1 Unemployment:

Nigerian youths has a population of 80 million, comprising of 60% of the total population, of which, 64 million of them are unemployed (10). Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, youth unemployment has continued to be on the increase. Youth unemployment rate rose from 9.62% in 1999 to 53.4% in the fourth quarter of 2020 (11); (12). Youth unemployment is noted to be the highest in the rural areas. (13) affirms that from 2010 – 2011, the number of unemployed youths in the rural areas rose from 47. 59% to 59.95%. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), their Q3 2018 report indicates that about 22.8% of rural dwellers are under employed while 13.7% of urban dwellers are underemployed at the same period (14). Factors that encourage youth unemployment include high population rate and inadequate school curricular. Deficient school curricular led to the training of students that are unemployable or lack the requisite skill that can afford them jobs. The quality of teaching in the rural areas is even poorer as they lack basic facilities and infrastructures that could encourage conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. Another reason is that there is lack of successful and active industries that can readily employ youths. Due to economic downturn and high operational costs experienced by industries which make it difficult for them to break even, many of them are reluctant to employ. Also, the Nigerian Government has not been able to make good public policies that could effectively tackle youth unemployment. This is partly caused by lack of correct information or accurate data that could help in formulation of good policies. The high unemployment rate has encouraged the vulnerability of the Nigerian youths. They are seen as tools to be used by the politicians because they do not have jobs and therefore find it difficult to pay their bills.

5.1.2 Monetization of Nigerian Politics:

Nigerian politics is highly monetized and this has been a discouragement to many youths. For instance, in the build – up to the 2015 election, the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC) Presidential nomination form for primary election was N27.5 million, and N45 million in 2018. In the build -up to the 2023 party primary election they charged N100 million (\$240,884), for Presidential aspirants, N50 million (\$85,470), for Governorship aspirants, N20 million (\$34,188), N10 million, (\$17,094) and N2 million (\$3,418) for Senate, House of Representatives and House of Assembly respectively (15). Though, they offered a 50% discount for aspirants that are less than 40 years, yet, the fee is still very exorbitant. The APC, was said to have defended their actions, by saying that they charged high fees in order to differentiate the “men from the boys” (15). The main opposition party, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) charged N40 million (\$68,376) as cost of nomination fees for Presidential aspirants. N21 million (\$35,897), N3.5 million (\$4,273) and N1.5 million (\$2,564) was charged for Governorship, Senate, House of Representatives and House of Assembly nomination forms respectively. This outrageous sum, unfortunately, constitute a very small fraction of the money that the aspirants will still spend. It was also observed that hotels in Abuja were all booked and the fees hiked in preparation for APC and PDP primary election (16). At Transcorp Hilton hotels, Maitama, the cheapest room rose from N107, 000 per day to N243,000 per day (16). Also, ahead of the primaries of the two dominant parties, APC and PDP, the aspirants started mopping up dollars that they will share to delegates which resulted to further crash and depreciation of naira (17). This trend in Nigerian politics has led to commercialization of politics and has been used to discourage youths from standing as candidates in election.

5.1.3 Minimal Investment in Nigerian Youth: The Government has not invested in building the youths capacity through training on how to take up representation roles. The youths lacked awareness on their roles as future leaders. This has made them to have a feeling of being alienated from politics. They were not trained to debate and deliberate on issues of national concerns. They are not identified early so as to be trained, nurtured and groomed to compete for and acquire power. They do not possess enough political knowledge and sense of civic duty.

5.1.4 Dominance of the Political Space by Old Politicians: this has been a bane to youth’s active political participation. The old politicians perceive politics as a job for only experienced people. They use various ways to discourage the youths from standing as candidates during elections including through increasing the age for political aspirants. Before the amendment of the constitution in 2018, the age requirement for President, Governor and Senators were pegged at 40 years and above.

5.1.5 Lack of Good Curricular: the school curricular was not designed in such a way as to teach students from an early age the essence of politics and the need to exercise their civic responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

The Nigerian youth bulge or population account for one of the highest in the world. This is occasioned by high fertility rates, bad family planning choices and low death rates. This scenario could be put into good use by utilizing the immense potentials in the youth for the benefit of the country.

Youth inclusion in politics is one sure way of encouraging sustainable development. The youth can champion new inventions in politics and governance if given the opportunity. When youth are not encouraged to invest their energies well, it leads to youth restiveness and does not encourage development. In order to encourage the full utilization of the youth for the benefit of the society and to encourage democratic principles and ethos, there is need to encourage youth inclusiveness in politics in Nigeria. Civic education should be encouraged in schools, where students are taught the main essence of political representation. Quota system, as practised in Uganda, can be introduced in Nigeria at the National Assemblies, as a sure way of ensuring that youth are represented substantially and their values and preferences captured in policy discourse. There is need to reduce the money spent by candidates during elections. The price of nomination forms should be low so as to encourage all to vie for political offices, as this is one of the essences of democracy. There is need to create jobs for the youth, so that they can direct their energy well and will not be used as tools to distort democratic

processes. School programmes or clubs like debating society, press club and student's consultative forum, could encourage interest in politics and should therefore be encouraged.

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