



ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МИРЕ

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Research article

Youth Engagement in Nigerian Politics: Age and Gender Differentials (as Perceived by Ijebu-Ode Community)

A. Olubela, O. Iyunade, A. Ogunsanya

Olabisi Onabanjo University
Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract. The importance of youth involvement in political and developmental processes of society can hardly be exaggerated. However, despite the large percentage of young people in Nigeria and the historical importance of intergenerational continuity with an emphasis on national identity, very little is really known about the degree of youth engagement in the country's politics. Therefore, this study, in the form of a descriptive survey, analyzes gender and age differentials of youth participation in Nigerian politics. A random sampling technique was used in selecting 200 youths from 5 political wards (40 from each ward) in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. Additionally, a self-structured questionnaire was designed and used for data collection, while a t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the three hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed no significant gender difference ($t = 1.56$, $P > 0.05$) or age difference ($t = 1.44$, $P > 0.05$) among the young population of Nigeria actively engaged in politics in the country. Conclusively, the authors recommend that efforts should be geared towards fighting illiteracy and unemployment in the country, as these are known to be main reasons for vandalism, senseless violence, anarchism, racketeering, and cultism among the Nigerian youth, while realistic political organizations under control and leadership of the young population should be formed.

Keywords: youths, politics, political participation, unemployment, poverty

Introduction

The level of youth participation in Nigeria politics is still relatively low in comparison with other countries of the world. This can be attributed to many factors, one of which is the volatility of Nigerian politics. F. Ogbeide asserts that youth participation in Nigerian politics is a very touchy issue, which “raises an eyebrow” every time it is mentioned [1]. In most countries, the “young population” falls within the age range of 18–40 years old. Meanwhile, irrespective of the age bracket, young people are characterized by certain other traits. These include: physical changes, biological changes, intellectual changes, emotional changes, increasing independence and sex interest.

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K. Bolaji remarked that the prior Military rule in Nigeria has negatively affected citizens' political participation in general and that of youth in particular, to an alarming degree [2]. Since the beginning of the democratization process that followed the end of the military regime in 1999, various studies have been attempted in order to examine the political participation and involvement of Nigerian citizens in the democracy development and decision making in the country. Currently, the study of political engagement of youth in Nigeria is still evolving. The studies have primarily been focused on youth involvement in electoral violence and political thuggery. I. Aghedo [3] observed that political participation of the youth is based on voter turnout, with political arrest and protest being very rare. This fact can be attributed to the unstable civil rule caused by the past military coup that had affected political socialization of Nigerians.

M. Sommers [4] suggested that the significance of youth involvement in political and developmental processes of society can hardly be overemphasized. The current conditions in a lot of developing nations, Nigeria in particular, have seriously decreased the potential of young people becoming agents of social change. According to O. Osumah and A.T. Aghemelo [5], these challenges range from economic and social to cultural. The appallingly high levels of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, in which younger generations of Nigerians have been stuck, have severely challenged their motivation and, in the long run, given rise to what sociologists call "attitudes of fatalism, resignation and acceptance of the situation". Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are interrelated conditions that generate human needs and, consequently, if the needs are not met, a state of deprivation. The persistence of these social problems has created an environment in which youth is easily manipulated by self-seeking politicians.

As M. Mutisi [6] observed, many Nigerian politicians take advantage of the poverty-stricken state of the country to exploit the people. They make use of the rebellious nature of the youth and use it as a political strategy to achieve their goals. The growing violent tendencies among youth organizations, such as the Bakassi Boys, the Movement for the Actualization of a Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Egbesu Boys, the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and others, are clear indicators of systematic militarization of Nigeria's democratic environment.

Ever since returning to democracy in May 1999, Nigeria has been facing complex challenges of sustaining the reborn democratic regime. In short, the progress of Nigerian democratization has not been all that impressive. E. Chidiogo explains this failure by that fact that the emerging democracy does not in any way reduce unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and corruption, or, for that matter, attempt to create a responsive, responsible and accountable government [7]. According to C. Nwosu [8], the current issues in Nigerian democracy are happening due to the fact that it is seen by the majority merely as an end to the military rule. Meanwhile, it should be viewed as establishment of reactive, responsible, and credible political institutions, capable of promoting an accountable, transparent, trustworthy government that would prevent corruption, respect human rights and rule of law and ensure popular sovereignty.

With regards to the situation described above, the Nigerian youth, which constitutes one of the largest segments of the Nigerian population, bears critical importance. This

study, therefore, examines the role of the youth in sustaining democracy in the country and suggests ways of encouraging them to participate in politics. Among these strategies are:

◆ *Focusing on education.* The survey data analysis showed that youth with a higher level of education are more likely to support the idea of elections to choose leaders in Nigeria. S.M. Usman [9] also suggests introducing more electoral education for voters.

◆ *Changing the minimum age for running in the elections.* Both A.A. Ujo [10] and M.G. Olujide [11] mention the importance of changing laws that impose age restrictions on running in the elections. Ujo observes that young candidates have increasingly better voter support, as well as an advantage over older candidates in the social media space, and, therefore should be eligible to run for the office [10]. Olujide agrees that young people had become more interested in running for political office, but notes that some election results were nullified or cancelled when candidates were found to be under-age [11]. A petition, commonly referred to as the #NotTooYoungToRun Bill, aiming to reduce the age requirements for elections, has been actively supported by younger population and a number of CSOs.

◆ *Building platforms for effective engagement.* N. Sika [12] suggests that in the future, focus should be placed on building more effective platforms to encourage communication between youth, elected leaders and the government, both during and outside of election times. She points out that some platforms do exist, such as the recent competition called Aso Villa Demo Day, which help to pitch ideas to the president, however, more efforts need to be made.

◆ *Targeting female voters.* Given the gender differences in voter turnout, sights should be set on expanding political participation more broadly and increasing female registration and engagement in the process.

Problem Statement

The incessant military incursion into the country's politics affected the political culture and political socialization of Nigerian people. Most Nigerians believe that the political scene in the country does not welcome citizens' participation. Hence, politics remains the province of those tough enough to stand against the political environment of Nigeria, which is characterized by electoral violence, political assassinations, "godfatherism", corruption, rigging, etc. Moreover, the process of recruitment in political blocs of Nigeria is equally questionable, due to the specifics of their financing: Nigerian political parties are sponsored by the powerful political elites that dictate *who gets what, when and how*, while in most developed democracies parties are financed through regular contributions paid by their own members. Although all political parties in Nigeria have a youth wing, in most cases their leaders are people above the "youth" age bracket. The youth have long represented an important constituent element for electoral mobilization in Nigeria. Today, as the young population has experienced an unprecedented growth and the nation is disproportionately burdened by un-/under employment, getting the young people to vote is becoming a high-priority task. Yet, despite their numerical strength and crucial importance for the country's development, very little is known about the actual state of affairs regarding the political participation of Nigerian youth.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents interviewed about the youth involvement in Nigerian politics, according to their gender.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents interviewed about the youth involvement in Nigerian politics, according to their age.

Ho3: There is no significant correlation between the gender and age of the respondents interviewed about the youth involvement in Nigerian politics.

Research Design

The current research adopted the form of a descriptive survey. A random sampling technique was used in selecting 200 youths from 5 political wards (40 from each ward) in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. Additionally, a self-structured questionnaire was designed and used for data collection, while a t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the three hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents interviewed about the youth participation in Nigerian politics, on the basis of their gender status.

Table 1

Gender differentials of the respondents

| Gender | N | Mean | SD | Std. Error | df | t | Sig of t |
|--------|----|-------|-------|------------|-----|------|----------|
| Male | 93 | 56.48 | 15.11 | 1.43 | 190 | 1.56 | 0.190 |
| Female | 99 | 70.49 | 14.19 | 0.96 | | | |

$t = 1.56, P > 0.05$

The results illustrated in table 1 reveal no significant gender difference ($t = 1.56, P > 0.05$). This implies that the arithmetic mean of 56.48 obtained from the male respondents, is not significantly different from the mean of 70.49 obtained from the female respondents at the 0.05 level (the respondents were interviewed on their opinion regarding the factors affecting youth participation in Nigerian politics). In other words, the observed difference is not statistically significant.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents interviewed about the youth involvement in Nigerian politics, on the basis of their age.

Table 2

Age differentials of the respondents

| Age | N | Mean | SD | Std. Error | df | t | Sig of t |
|----------------|-----|-------|-------|------------|-----|------|----------|
| Below 18 years | 56 | 52.17 | 11.92 | 0.90 | 190 | 1.44 | 0.20 |
| Above 18 years | 136 | 54.60 | 11.39 | 1.02 | | | |

$t = 1.44, P > 0.05$

The results in table 2 revealed no significant age difference ($t = 1.44, P > 0.05$). This indicates that the arithmetic mean of 52.17 obtained from respondents below the age of 18, is not significantly different from the mean of 54.60 obtained from the respon-

dents above the age of 18 at the 0.05 level. Yet again, the observed difference is not statistically significant, which means that the age of the respondents does not influence their views on the factors affecting youth participation in Nigerian politics.

Ho3: There is no significant correlation between the gender and age of the respondents interviewed about the youth involvement in Nigerian politics.

Table 3

Correlation of gender and age differentials of the respondents

| Parameter | Coefficient | Standard Error | T-cal | Probability |
|-----------|-------------|----------------|--------|-------------|
| Constant | 51.492 | 4.011 | 15.023 | 0.000 |
| Gender | 3.820 | 2.015 | 1.209 | 0.144 |
| Age | 2.450 | 1.373 | 1.204 | 0.140 |

$$R^2 = 0.016, \text{ Adjusted } R^2 = 0.007, \text{ F-Statistic} = 3.144$$

In table 3, the gender and age of respondents as the only independent variables account for 16.0% of the total variation in respondents' views ($R^2 = 0.016$, $P > 0.05$). Again, this is statistically insignificant. Therefore, the gender-age differential does not play a meaningful role in respondents' opinions on the effects of non-participation of youth in Nigerian politics.

Summary of Findings

As a result of the analysis, the authors drew the following conclusions:

1. The gender of the respondents interviewed about the spread and tendencies of youth participation in Nigerian politics does not influence their opinions on the matter.
2. The age of the respondents is irrelevant to what they think about the factors affecting youth participation in Nigerian politics.
3. The gender and age of respondents (as a combined determinant) has no significant effect on their opinions about the political activity of the Nigerian youth.
4. The majority of the respondents believed that youth involvement in Nigerian politics needs to be improved.

Discussion of Findings

The study has revealed that although political participation of young Nigerians is still generally low, it is gradually on the rise as compared to before. This point is underpinned by S. Adejumobi [13], M. Olujide [11] and I. Aghedo, who remark that the latest elections saw an increase in "youth-owned, youth-driven and youth-led movements" [3]. As a result of the 2015 general elections, the only elected governor out of the 36 states of the Nigerian federation that fits into the category of 'youth' is Governor of Kogi State Yahaya Bello. Considering the events that accompanied the elections, Bello's electoral victory can be considered nothing short of a miracle. Such state of events is a far cry from the acceptable statistics regarding youth political representation in other countries the world. At the same time, according to the findings, in the past, young Nigerians were not interested in participating in political affairs simply because of their distrust in the system. The declining pattern of young people's participation in political life in developing countries was also noted by F.O. Ogbeide [1] and E. Chidiogo [7]. The lack

of political motivation among the Nigerian youth can be partially explained by limited influence of the traditional media such as radio, television and the press.

Another finding of the given research is that non-participation of the youth in political activities often affects the general pace of development of the country. This point is in line with the conclusions of O. Osumah and A.T. Aghemelo [5], who attributed the political decay in Nigeria to the reluctance of young, active and energetic people that could make a difference to participate in the country's politics. As far as possible measures addressing the lack of political interest are concerned, the study suggests that more sensitization and awareness-raising work be done to encourage young Nigerians' political involvement. Also, it seems reasonable to provide more opportunity for the young people of Nigeria to run for political office.

Conclusion

In the course of the analysis, the authors came to the conclusion that recently there has been a shift in the paradigm of youth political participation in Nigeria as per the results of the 2015 general elections. The political attitudes exhibited by young Nigerians in the recent election campaign showed that, generally, they believe in the importance of having a trustworthy election process more than they did before. Civically and politically, the youth becomes increasingly engaged in activities aimed at ensuring more credible elections. This tendency is reflected in the increasing number of youth groups participating in various activities, such as voter education, promotion of peace, election monitoring and polling-center supervision.

The 2019 general elections brought about some positive changes as it provided more opportunities for young people's participation. As compared to the previous elections and their repercussions, the 2019 elections have demonstrated a dynamic shift from destructive to constructive political engagement. The latest elections in Nigeria have indicated a trend for improved governance and growing awareness of young people's potential to act as agents of change. However, young Nigerians can further improve the effectiveness of future elections by constructively engaging stakeholders in the electoral process. Also, the youth can continue to use various platforms to popularize positive civic and political involvement in the coming elections.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the conducted research, it is recommended that the following steps should be taken:

1. Efforts must be geared towards fighting illiteracy and unemployment as these phenomena are the main reasons for vandalism, senseless violence, anarchism, racketeering and cultism among young people involved in political activities in Nigeria.

2. Also, the young should be consulted regarding their input in the design and implementation of employment and poverty alleviation programs, such as the N.D.E. and NAPEP among others. Such programs are capable of achieving a notable boost in employment and reducing poverty in the country. Special funds should be allocated at all levels of the government to proceed with these programs. Anti-unemployment measures will help to prevent or decrease the undue manipulation of youths for selfish purposes by overzealous politicians.

3. Young people of Nigeria should form realistic youth organizations under their own control and leadership. The leaders should be ready to pursue the interest of the young at all times, as well as assist in building solid and democratic practices in the country.

4. Similarly, the young should strengthen and expand the connections which with other democratically inclined groups, such as the Nigerian Labor Congress, National Association of Nigerian Students, Nigerian Bar Association and other human rights organizations striving for positive change in national politics and promoting policies for effective advocacy of people's rights and aspirations.

5. Also, youth organizations need to avoid parochialism and forge a nation-wide pan-Nigerian alliance. They must strive hard to transcend the ethno-regional divides encouraged by the ruling class and be firm and united in their moving towards democratic development.

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Участие молодежи в нигерийской политике: возрастные и гендерные различия (восприятие сообщества Иджебу-Оде)

А. Олубела, О. Юнаде, А. Огунсанья

Университет Олабиси Онабанджо
Аго-Ивойе, Штат Огун, Нигерия

Аннотация. Важность участия молодежи в политических процессах и процессах развития общества трудно переоценить. Однако, несмотря на большой процент молодежи в демографической структуре Нигерии и историческую важность преемственности поколений с акцентом на национальную идентичность, сравнительно мало известно о степени участия молодежи в политике страны. В статье в форме описательного опроса анализируются гендерные и возрастные параметры участия молодежи в нигерийской политике. Авторы использовали метод случайной выборки при отборе 200 молодых людей из 5 политических палат (по 40 из каждой палаты) в районе местного самоуправления Иджебу-Оде штата Огун. Также для сбора данных был разработан и использован опросник, а для проверки трех выдвинутых авторами гипотез на уровне значимости 0,05 использовались *t*-критерий Стьюдента и дисперсионный анализ (ANOVA). Проведенное исследование не выявило значимых гендерных ($t = 1.56, P > 0.05$) или возрастных различий ($t = 1.44, P > 0.05$) среди молодого населения Нигерии, активно занимающегося политической деятельностью. В заключение предлагаются рекомендации для правительства Нигерии — направить усилия на борьбу с неграмотностью и безработицей в стране, поскольку они являются основными причинами вандализма, бессмысленного насилия, анархизма, рэкета и культизма среди нигерийской молодежи, а также способствовать формированию реальных политических организаций под контролем и руководством молодежи страны.

Ключевые слова: молодежь, политика, участие в политической жизни, безработица, бедность

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Сведения об авторах:

Олубела Афолаби — кандидат социологических наук, преподаватель кафедры преподавания гуманитарных и социальных наук Университета Олабиси Онабанджо (Нигерия) (e-mail: afolabi.olubela@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng).

Юнаде Олуфунмилайо — кандидат педагогических наук, старший преподаватель кафедры преподавания гуманитарных и социальных наук Университета Олабиси Онабанджо (Нигерия) (e-mail: iyunade.funmi@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng).

Огунсанья Адеола — преподаватель кафедры преподавания гуманитарных и социальных наук Университета Олабиси Онабанджо (Нигерия) (e-mail: adeola.ogunsanya@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng).

Information about the authors:

Olubela Afolabi — PhD in Social Sciences, Lecturer of the Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education (ASSED), Olabisi Onabanjo University (Nigeria) (e-mail: afolabi.olubela@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng).

Iyunade Olufunmilayo — PhD in Education, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education (ASSED), Olabisi Onabanjo University (Nigeria) (e-mail: iyunade.funmi@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng).

Ogunsanya Adeola — Lecturer of the Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education (ASSED), Olabisi Onabanjo University (Nigeria) (e-mail: adeola.ogunsanya@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng).

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