

The Role of the Youth in the Electoral Process in Nigeria Politics: From Historical Appraisal

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I. INTRODUCTION

An electoral system may be defined as a process or method through which the people of a given country elect their representative into different political offices or positions in government. It also includes the conditions and processes for the nomination of candidates for elective posts including procedure and rules of election.

The burden of this paper is to refute that misguided advice. The truth is that the place and participation of youths in our political process cannot be undermined, or over emphasized. For your democracy to be meaningful, stable and functional, our youths must be part of the shaping process. The youths have both a right and a responsibility to help shape the future that they will inherit and the quality of life that they will experience. It is not neat and proper for adults alone to decide on the balance between war and peace, the priorities and strength of the economy, or the health of the environment as it were young voices and voters are equally essential in the body polity.

As the largest demographic group in Nigeria, young people have shown a strong willingness to be more involved in policy-making. Younger generations can boost political processes and they are the ones who will see the results of the changes they wish to bring about. Youth assemblies should be given empowerment through knowledge. The core issues or essence of youth activism include the following:

- To increase political and civil participation among the young, whose faith are fixed in the future.
- Build inclusive, accountable responsible followership and
- To increase public awareness about the value of participation in democracy through the electoral process.

What do we mean by “Youth”?

“Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group.

However, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment. Therefore “youth” is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency.

When carrying out its Youth Strategy, UNESCO uses different definitions of youth depending on the context.

For activities at international or at regional level, such as the African Youth Forum, UNESCO uses the United Nations’ universal definition.

The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health.

For activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth programme, “youth” may be understood in a more flexible manner. UNESCO will then adopt the definition of “youth” as used by a particular Member State. It can be based for instance on the definition given in the African Youth Charter where “youth” means “every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years”.

Youth is the time of life when one is young, and often means the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity).^{[1][2]} It is also defined as "the appearance, freshness, vigor, spirit, etc., characteristic of one

who is young".^[3] Its definitions of a specific age range varies, as youth is not defined chronologically as a stage that can be tied to specific age ranges; nor can its end point be linked to specific activities, such as taking unpaid work or having sexual relations without consent.^[4]

Youth is an experience that may shape an individual's level of dependency, which can be marked in various ways according to different cultural perspectives. Personal experience is marked by an individual's cultural norms or traditions, while a youth's level of dependency means the extent to which he still relies on his family emotionally and economically.^[4]

Around the world, the English terms *youth*, *adolescent*, *teenager*, *kid*, and *young person* are interchanged, often meaning the same thing,^[5] but they are occasionally differentiated. *Youth* can be referred to as the time of life when one is young. This involves childhood, and the time of life which is neither childhood nor adulthood, but rather somewhere in between.^{[6][7]} *Youth* also identifies a particular mindset of attitude, as in "He is very *youthful*". For certain uses, such as employment statistics, the term also sometimes refers to individuals from the ages of 14 to 21.^[8] However, the term *adolescence* refers to a specific age range during a specific developmental period in a person's life, unlike youth which is a socially constructed category.^[9]

The United Nations defines *youth* as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 with all UN statistics based on this range, the UN states education as a source for these statistics. The UN also recognizes that this varies without prejudice to other age groups listed by member states such as 18–30. A useful distinction within the UN itself can be made between teenagers (i.e. those between the ages of 13 and 19) and young adults (those between the ages of 18 and 32). While seeking to impose some uniformity on statistical approaches, the UN itself is aware of contradictions between approaches in its own statutes. Hence under the 15–24 definition (introduced in 1981) children are defined as those under the age of 14 while under the 1979 Convention on the Rights of the Child, those under the age of 18 are regarded as children.^[10] The UN also states they are aware that several definitions exist for youth within UN entities such as Youth Habitat 15–32 and African Youth Charter 15–35.

Although linked to biological processes of development and aging, *youth* is also defined as a social position that reflects the meanings different cultures and societies give to individuals between childhood and adulthood. The term in itself when referred to in a manner of social position, can be ambiguous when applied to someone of an older age with very low social position; potentially when still dependent on their guardians.^[11] Scholars argue that age-based definitions have not been consistent across cultures or times and that thus it is more accurate to focus on social processes in the transition to adult independence for defining youth.^[12]

"This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease." – Robert Kennedy^[13]

Youth is the stage of constructing the self-concept. The self-concept of youth is influenced by variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender, and culture.^[14] It is a time of a person's life when their choices are most likely to affect their future.^[15]

Other definitions

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, the term "youth" is associated with young men from 15 to 30 or 35 years of age. Youth in Nigeria includes all members of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18–35.^[16] Many African girls experience youth as a brief interlude between the onset of puberty and marriage and motherhood. But in urban settings, poor women are often considered youth much longer, even if they bear children outside of marriage. Varying culturally, the gender constructions of youth in Latin America and Southeast Asia differ from those of sub-Saharan Africa. In Vietnam, widespread notions of youth are sociopolitical constructions for both sexes between the ages of 15 and 35.^[17]

In Brazil, the term *youth* refers to people of both sexes from 15 to 29 years old. This age bracket reflects the influence on Brazilian law of international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO). It is also shaped by the notion of adolescence that has entered everyday life in Brazil through a discourse on children's rights.^[17]

II. HISTORY OF ELECTION IN NIGERIA

Election and Electoral Processes in Nigerian History: Election is a process in the appointment of persons to manage the affairs of families, groups, states and inter-state spaces. It is a vital aspect of the global democratic practices. There are so many processes involved, yet there are so many corners that could be cut and plugged, if and when the political gladiators wish. Nigeria as a geopolitical entity has had her fair share of elections and electoral processes. Today, we shall examine election as a concept and its history in Nigeria. The essence of this preoccupation is not only to be armed with the knowledge of elections in Nigeria but also to exude the lessons that can be learnt for the sake of the future.

What is an Election?

An election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. According to Dye (2001), election is “a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; the key to participation in a democracy; and the way of giving consent to government”. Sometimes, this consent makes little or no sense because the bourgeois are sure of taking the upper hand either by buying votes or by rigging through physical snatching of ballot boxes. Hence, one can say that Iyayi (2004) is right in observing that “democracy (and elections) can be a plus and also a big minus for the common man”. According to Iyayi, this was the case even in the Greek city state with which the classical idea of democracy is most closely associated, (where) only free men could participate in the debates and therefore influence the mode of governance of the city. Thus, slaves were not allowed to participate in the debates – as the Greek city was divided between the nobility and subjects and freemen and slaves”. The emergence of cotemporary political bourgeois has not changed anything, hence the struggles to redefine the meaning and the practice of democracy and elections continues to-date. But what is indisputable is that almost everyone is comfortable with elections and electioneering processes in so far as they can participate in the process, and regardless of who wins.

Types and Phases of Elections. There are two types of elections: Primary and General elections. A primary election is a nominating election in which the field of candidates that will run in the general election is chosen. Victory in a primary usually results in a candidate being nominated or endorsed by a political party for the general election. A general election is an election held to choose among candidates nominated in a primary (or by convention, caucus or petition) for federal, state and/or local office. The purpose of a general election is to make a final choice among the various candidates who have been nominated by parties. Elections are not necessarily about Election Day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities before, during and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access; it includes campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register; it includes the independence or lack of it of electoral agencies and organs. It includes the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of elections (Iyayi, 2004).

Phases of Electoral Process Hence, the electoral process can be divided into three main phases: 1. Pre-election phase: which includes activities such as delimitation, voter registration, registration of political parties, nomination process, campaign process, media and civic and voter education. 2. Election phase: this phase has to do with Election Day activities including polling stations, secrecy of ballot, ballot papers, ballot boxes, election materials, counting, election monitoring and observation. 3. Post-election phase: This includes announcement of results, post election review and post election disputes.

Conditions for Free and fair Elections. There are four conditions for the conduct of a free and fair election, namely: 1. An independent judiciary to interpret the electoral laws. 2. An honest, competent non-partisan electoral body to manage the elections. 3. A developed system of political parties. 4. A general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game.

Mackenzie (1967 in Legborsi (2011)) Standards for smooth electoral process. There are standards which contribute to uniformity, reliability, consistency, accuracy and overall professionalism in elections. These standards include: 1. Constitutional provision that provide the foundation for the key elements of electoral framework including electoral rights and the basic principles of the electoral system. 2. Electoral law that guides the conduct of the elections including the powers of the electoral management bodies and governmental bodies. 3. The election administration must demonstrate respect for the law; be non-partisan and neutral; transparent; accurate, professional and competent and must be designed to serve the voters. 4. The electoral system should guarantee political inclusiveness, representation, frequency of elections and fairness in the organization of electoral units. 5. The organization of electoral units is done in such a way as to achieve the objective of according equal weight to each vote to the greatest degree possible to ensure effective representation. 6. The legal framework should ensure that all eligible citizens are guaranteed the right to universal and equal suffrage as well as the right to contest elections without any discrimination. 7. The electoral management bodies are established and operate in a manner that ensures the independent and impartial administration of elections. 8. Voters registers are maintained in a manner that is transparent and accurate and protects the rights of qualified citizens to register, and prevents the unlawful or fraudulent registration or removal of persons. 9. All political parties and candidates are able to compete in elections on the basis of equitable treatment. 10. The electoral campaigns are organized in such a way that each political party and candidate enjoys the right to freedom of expression and freedom of association, and has access to the electorate, and that all stakeholders in the election process have an equal chance of success. 11. All political parties and candidates have access to the media owned or controlled by the state and those privately owned and that no unreasonable limitations are placed on the right of political parties and candidates to free expression during election campaigns. 12. All political parties and candidates are equitably treated by legal provisions governing campaign finances and expenditures. 13. Polling stations are accessible and that there is accurate recording of ballots and that the secrecy of the ballot is guaranteed. 14. All votes are counted and tabulated accurately, equally, fairly and transparently. 15. There are representatives of parties and candidates

contesting the election to observe all voting processes. 16. To ensure transparency and to increase credibility, there should be provision for election observers to observe all stages of election process, and 17. There should be compliance with and enforcement of the electoral law. Elections in Nigerian History→ But the pertinent question is: 'Do the Votes Count in Nigeria?' Okoye (2003:vii) Returning to Iyayi (2004), it is instructive to first of all peruse the essence of Okoro (2003)'s position because as Iyayi opines, a positive political culture will respect the tenets of democratic governance for the sake of development. In his words, Iyayi submitted that "a political culture that is defined by violence makes development impossible because by its very nature, such a political culture is destructive of the need and motivation for achievement". A culture of elections that is "marked by violence and warfare is thus totally anathema to the possibilities of development" (Iyayi, 2004). But have we always had elections this way? I will leave you to judge or answer the question at the end of the class after the discussions. The elections so far held in Nigeria can be categorized into five different phases: 1. Elections in the colonial period (1922 – 1959); 2. Elections in the early years of independence (1960-1965); 3. Elections during the years of military rule; 4. Elections under civilian regimes in-between the years of military rule; and 5. Elections during civilian to civilian transition (1999 to-date). A number of elections were held in Nigeria in the colonial period. These elections began with the legislative councils in Lagos and Calabar from 1922 (Akerle, 2003), the first set being the elections in Lagos and Calabar in September 1923 after the introduction of Sir. Hugh Clifford Constitution in 1922. The growth of the labour movement and the development of towns led to concessions by colonial authorities that culminated in these city and legislative council elections. By 1938, for example, the Nigerian Youth Movement, an organisation that was hostile to British colonial interests in Lagos in particular and Nigeria in general was able to win three out of the four available seats in the city council elections. In the same year, it also won all three legislative seats in the legislative council elections. Several other elections took place between 1951 and 1959. While the 1951 Regional Legislative elections took place under the Macpherson constitution of the same year, the 1954 elections took place under the new Federal Constitution. Whereas all constitutions up to 1954 limited the right of elections to certain members of the population, universal adult suffrage was adopted in 1958, and took effect in 1959. However, Women in northern Nigeria were legally disqualified from voting until 1977, when an electoral decree granted them suffrage. The December 12, 1959 general elections into Local Councils, Regional and Federal Legislatures ushered in Nigeria's political independence in 1960. The most notable feature of that year's election was the entrenchment of tri-regional party system reflecting the dominant ethnic group in each region - Northern People's Congress (NPC): Northern Nigeria; Action Group (AG): Western Nigeria and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC): Eastern Nigeria, and the emergence of three prominent Political leaders for the three-dominant regional and ethnic based political parties: (Sir Ahmadu Bello – NPC, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe – NCNC and Chief Obafemi Awolowo – AG). Other sets of elections in post independence Nigeria (1960-65) were marked by crises resulting from the disputed census figures released in March 1961. The 1964 general elections which were marked by boycotts in the East, Midwest, Lagos and parts of the Western Region, political violence, physical intimidation of opposition politicians and their campaigners, procedural violations, disagreements from alliances forged between the dominant parties and some minority parties in the regions, and the tension that followed the October 1965 elections into the Regional Government of the West. For example, the October 1965 elections into the Regional Government of the West were no less farcical because although the people clearly rejected the Akintola government at the polls and voted massively for the AG opposition party, 'the Akintola government publicly (interfered) with the results of the elections. In very many cases, AG candidates who held certificates that they were duly elected in their constituencies later heard their names mentioned as defeated candidates through governmental news media" (Ademoyega, 1981:21-22). These developments, including the simmering TIV revolt in the Middle Belt, the political impasse at the centre, the resulting mass revolt in the Western Region by the people who felt rightly that they had been cheated at the polls set the stage for the first military coup of January 15, 1966. These developments, among others, set the stage for the first military coup of January 15, 1966, which led to the assassination of some prominent politicians of the first republic. The military rulers conducted three elections during their period of misrule. These were (i) the elections of 1979, under the first coming of Obasanjo, (ii) the 1992-1993 elections under General Babangida and (iii) the 1999 elections under General Abdusalami Abubakar. From 1983, three sets of elections were conducted under the civilian regimes. These were: (i) the general elections of 1983 under the Alhaji Shehu Shagari NPN government, (ii) the general elections of 2003 and 2007 under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and (iii) the 2011 and 2015 general elections under Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Commenting on these elections, especially on the first and the last, the EU Election Group, which monitored the 2003 elections suggested that, 'the most free, fair and peacefully conducted elections in Nigeria were those in 1959, 1979, 1993 and 1999, and the most chaotic, violent and disputed were those in 1964 and 1983. The reason for this is that the first three were 'transition' elections in which the regimes in power and responsible for organising the elections had to hand over power to a democratic civilian regime. The 2015 elections were unique because parties chose to seek redress in courts and electoral panels rather than take laws into their hands. Indeed, President Goodluck

Jonathan conceded defeat and handed over to the government of President Muhammadu Buhari. Features of elections in Nigeria— Iyayi (2004) identified five features of elections from colonial to date: 1. Elections in Nigeria have been particularly characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation of political opponents and controversy. The governments in power have had their own designs and used the instruments of the state in penetrating electoral brigandage, thuggery, violence and warfare. 2. Elections in Nigeria are devoid of continuity in the political organisations through which both violence and warfare have been conducted. Each period has thus produced new political formations reflecting not only the penchant for lack of principle and shifting allegiance among members of the political class but also the total de-ideologisation of the issues on which members of the class were divided into antagonistic camps. 3. Elections in Nigeria lacks defined pattern to the way in which members of the class change their political allegiance. This situation assumed such tragic proportions in the 2003 elections that an individual politician could and did change party membership three of four times on the same day. 4. The implication of (3) above is that the parties have not been defined by ideological positions that set them apart from each other. And yet, such defining and at the same time limiting ideologies are crucial to the development of a genuine political culture for several reasons. 5. Elections in Nigeria have failed to promote the emergence of a democratic culture even within the limited application that it has within a bourgeois social order. Indeed, each set of elections seems to deepen the culture of violence, authoritarianism, abuse of human rights, corruption and crass materialism in Nigeria. Each succeeding election seems to perfect in an even more perverse sense, the abuses that characterised the earlier elections. Thus with each successive election, the ruling elites are not only more and more isolated from the people, they also come to relate with them increasingly through violence, contempt, repression and authoritarianism. Electoral Commissions in Nigeria— 1. Nigerian Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was lead by Chief Eyo Esua (1964–1966) in the First Republic. When General Olusegun Obasanjo prepared for a return to civilian power in the Second Republic, he established a new Federal 2. Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) headed by Chief Michael Ani to supervise the 1979 elections. Ani was succeeded by Justice Victor Ovie Whisky. 3. During the Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha regimes, which attempted returns to democracy, the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) was headed by Professor Eme Awa (1987–1989), Professor Humphrey Nwosu (1989–1993), Professor Okon Uya and Chief Sumner Dagogo-Jack (1994–1998). 4. General Abdulsalami Abubakar established the current INEC, with Justice Ephraim Akpata as chairman. Akpata had to deal with 26 political associations, giving only nine provisional registration as political parties for the 1998/1999 elections, eventually whittled down to three parties. Despite efforts to ensure free and fair elections, the process drew serious criticism from international observers. 5. After Akpata died in January 2000, the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed Abel Guobadia Nigeria's Chief Electoral Officer, a position that was confirmed by the Nigerian Senate in May 2000. Guobadia was responsible for the 2003 elections, which were marred by widespread violence and other irregularities. 6. In June 2005, Guobadia retired and was succeeded by Professor Maurice Iwu. Soon after being appointed, Iwu announced that foreign monitors would not be allowed during elections, but only foreign election observers. This decision was condemned by politicians and civil society groups who called for his immediate removal from office. The conduct of the 2007 elections was again criticized as falling below acceptable democratic standards. 7. On 8 June 2010 Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega was nominated by President Goodluck Jonathan as the new INEC Chairman, subject to Senate confirmation, as a replacement for Iwu, who had vacated the post on 28 April 2010. 8. Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega vacated the office on June 30th, 2015. He hand-over to Amina Zakari as Ag. INEC Chairman. 9. Mahmood Yakubu, the current Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was appointed to office by President Muhammadu Buhari on 21 October 2015, succeeding Amina Zakari, who served as acting chairman. References Ademoyega, A. (1981) *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*. Ibadan: Evan Publishers Akerele, A. (2003) *Electoral Reforms: An Agenda for Reform*. 3rd Ambrose Alli Memorial Lecture, Ekpoma: Ambrose Alli University Dye, R. T. (2001) *Politics in America*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle Rivers 'Electoral Commission through the Years'

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The Electoral Process

The electoral process is a total process that includes registration of voters, indentifying the political parties to be voted for, voting, counting of votes, and declaration of election results. This process is the foundation of civil societies. A strong civil society is vital and needed to serve as the bedrock of a stable

democracy. It represents the reservoir of resources political, economic, cultural, and moral – to complement and, when necessary, to check the power of the state. A dynamic and diverse civil society directly stimulates social and political participation, increasing the involvement and commitment of citizens and promoting an appreciation of the obligations, as well as the rights, of citizenship. By providing many potential avenues for political, economic and social expression, a society with a rich associational life gives people a stronger stake in the social order. This in turn, creates a climate within which mutual respect, tolerance, negotiation and compromise actually make sense, and seeks to prove that under the banner of representation and multi-party political systems. Elections are used as a means by which representatives and policies are decided. The choice between political parties or individual candidates is made through elections. John Stuart Mill argued that: There is no difficulty in showing that the ideally best form of government is that in which the sovereignty or supreme controlling power in the last resort is vested in the entire aggregate of the community; every citizen not only having a voice in the exercise of that ultimate sovereignty but being at least occasionally called on to take an actual part in the government, by the personal discharge of some public function, local or general (186) Emphasis added).

It should be noted that the public function implies elections. This electoral process is the peaceful transfer of power and legitimate exercise of authority. It demands active, broad-based citizen participation. It is the election that actually determines who shall wield power for a number of years as specified by the constitution. According to Ologbenla (78), an electoral system may be defined as a process in which the mode of coming to power or the change of government is decided in a particular country at a given time. According to encyclopedia Britannica, election is defined “as not only to allow the masses to participate in the electoral process but also to hold the leaders accountable for their performance in office.” And the Encyclopaedia of social sciences defines election as the process of selecting the officers or representatives of organizations or groups by the vote of its qualified members. This is different from the method of appointment or lot casting. The electoral process in Nigeria presents a paradox because, from our theoretical formulation of the electoral process, there is nothing to imply violence, which is rife in reality. The only reason is hinged on the fact that the Nigeria state structure and those that operate its apparatus are largely minor bourgeois. This class of rulers lack economic base in the true sense, so they seek to use state power to accumulate personal power within the Nigerian political economy. Therefore, gaining access to political power is a do or die affair. Violence, assimilation and ethnicity become veritable tools employed to gain access to power and to maintain and sustain that power. There is no doubt that these scrupulous politicians often engage the services of youths to achieve their aims.

Youth people in Nigeria and across the world have always led social and political movements as it is now young people express their concern for their communities through community services, their social activism manifest around issues such as the environment, joblessness and political instability. Students overwhelmingly consider political engagement as an effective way of solving important issues both in their local communities and around the nation.

Youth participation is essentially hinged on the desire to maintain a balance by accepting contrary views without resorting to violence. Indeed, young people are positive assets to political and civil society. And it is important to remark that to uphold this principle, voting for issues rather than individuals should be the reason for participation. The end product of youth activism should be to provide a forum where young people from different communities can learn to communicate with each other and express their opinions in a dialogue with local state and federal administrators.

Youth Empowerment through Knowledge

Empowerment through knowledge is predicated on the explicit relationship between knowledge and development, and in the conviction that it is the key element in the development of nations peoples, communities and individual. The term empowerment captures the true essence of development - giving people the power, defined in terms of adequate knowledge and capacity, to decide what is best for them and to act accordingly in fulfilling their own destinies (Okwechime 51). Youths should, therefore, be given the opportunity to work for a better future for their communities through constructive and creative engagements, as opposed to the win-at-all costs mentality in the electoral process that is currently quite prevalent.

School for Democracy

Political authorities should step up activities to encourage open and frank dialogue especially where the ethnic divide is particularly deep. The aim is to provide platforms for young people to discuss their concerns within democratic structures. This way they will learn how to organize and plan various activities and find the proper tools to implement them. In other words, the youth activism assemblies will become a kind of school for democracy in the sense that tolerance will be the watchword. Youth participation in policy-making is important. Decisions taken with the framework of youth participation will make a difference at the local community level

when youth leasers are incorporated, they will take oath to fulfill their duties honourable, impartially with conscience and in accordance with the law plans must be made to ensure fair and transparent electoral processes with young peoples participation. It will prove and demonstrate that young people from different ethnic backgrounds can find a common language to communicate. Besides the multi-ethnic component, gender balance should also be a requirement in positive youth activism. At the youth level, women should be encouraged to seek elective offices.

Investing in Youths is investing in Change

To enhance youth activism, the various governments should invest in the youth by having governments should invest in the youth by having youth assemblies with thematic committees. There could be different committees for education, culture and sports, ecology and environmental protection. There should also be a committee for young people with physical disabilities. The various groups should be engaged in concrete project under the supervision of the Ministry of Youth, culture and Social Development. When done, National or general Elections will no longer appear to be a veritable source of money making. The budget of each group should be monitored and the funding for these projects could come from donor agencies developing a better understanding of young voters is an important first step in a young voter campaign strategy of the electoral process. A critical part of encouraging youth activism is visiting their turf.

School programs, debate, workplace, community centres, churches, clubs and school sports events all should be venues for investing in youth the necessary positive change in our polity.

Investing in youth will be incomplete if the political gender inequality is not addressed. The Ministry of Women Affairs should begin working with young women to stimulate greater participation in the election process. Young women activist should be trained and retrained for election related skills. They should also conduct focus group research to assess women's attitudes and assist parties in developing strategies to target this audience in the lead-up to electoral processes. Women should play more active roles in the efforts to reduce corrupt electoral practices, promote voter awareness and empowerment in the political process.

Improve Political Party Communication

The increasing reports of random political assassination, referred to as Armed Killing on Duty (AKD), attests to the public's dissatisfaction with governance in the country and the electoral process in particular. It is becoming clear that a majority of Nigerians believe that their expectations have not been met. There should be improved political party communication to address the traditional lack of activity between elections. Particular improvement should be external and internal communication and communication with the governing party. The goals are to help parties develop active dialogue with the electoral through national and local media and direct voter contact. It will also promote internal party democracy by encouraging regular and frequent communication within the parties at all levels.

Youth in Politics Internship Program

As part of youth activism, they should learn and acquire the skills for campaign management, fund raising, recruitment, party branch development, communications, voter reach, voter contact and mobilization and Election Day simulation. There should be focused efforts on assisting youth party members to develop and implement coordinated electoral strategies and encourage voter participation.

Youth Activism and Promotion of Social Justice

Youth activities should promote social justice in the communities. Youth activism should incorporate education of themselves, colleagues, families and friends about the current and important issues facing their communities. Apathy is dangerous. Participation in the nation's political process is a central belief within the teachings of our diverse traditions. As the nation continues to grow more diverse, - creation of more Local Government Areas/States, the need for diverse participation in the electoral process by the electorate becomes ever more compelling. Now, more than ever, this country's leaders must hear from younger generations during the electoral process. Voter registration and participation should not merely be encouraged but stressed as an absolute necessity.

The Nigerian Youth must now wake-up and remind politicians why they are running and for whom they are fighting. Young people between the ages of 18-35 represent almost 50 percent of the voting age population in the country. If young people voted their number, they would change the dialogue about who gets what, when and how of the political pie.

In fact, now is the time for young voters to step up to the podium and let political candidates step up to the podium and let political candidates know that they can no longer ignore the concerns of the young people. Youths should get educated, get registered, and ensure that future generations will always have a voice. Youth activism should aim at providing education, research and the promotion of fair and just society. Youths should be encouraged to participate more actively and effectively in public life and decision-making. Youth activism

should also engage in exchange of knowledge and expertise that would strengthen their participation in building democratic processes.

Two out of the many critical observations made by Anifowose and Babawale (2003), “That the structure of the Nigeria federation is deficient thereby creating problems for the political processes,” and “There is the need to further expand the democratic space to ensure a truly inclusive political process”, make the need for further research into Youth Activism most essential.

There is the urgent need for a research project that will explore the best practices in increasing youth civic engagement and voter participation, including culturally specific messaging, youth as a viable constituency for political candidates and peer-to-peer civic engagement models.

The following can be regarded as teasers:

1. Youth voting patterns: what ignited young people to vote in past elections?
2. What can compel and unite young people in the electoral process?
3. Public policy – a new generation of political leadership: what will it take to increase youth interest in public service as a career choice?
4. Best practices: Youths lead the way in getting their peers to vote.

Youth Activism Fraught with Violence: What is to be done?

Perhaps, one may now say that Strachans’ “Stay away” is predicated on this violence. But then, according to Prof. G. G. Darah, youth violence is the product or creation of petty bourgeois that benefit in the long run from the crises. In the wake of incidents of hazing, assassination, and insecurity of life and property, youth activism should be clearly defined.

Preventing Youth Violence

Prevention plans involving technical assistance, community-based services, inter-agency co-ordination and comprehensive data collection, best practices, statewide resources and collection of state-specific data should be put in place. A youth violence prevention council should be set up to study ways to reduce juvenile crime and encourage healthy youth behavior as well.

There should also be broad prevention strategies with the state department of education will developing comprehensive actions plans for preventing violence in each public school, utilizing skill building and youth development strategies.

Youth Programs

Youth programs across a broad spectrum of objectives should be pursued.

- Youth development and empowerment
- Youth engagement in the civic process
- Academic enrichment and mentoring through after school programs
- Making youth programs more accessible and preventing youth delinquency and substance abuse
- Establish a taskforce to study the effects of mentoring youths in the juvenile justice system
- After school practical experiments – produce comprehensive dropout prevention and recovery programs
- Create a mechanism to fund delinquency prevention and intervention programs
- Youth organizations, particularly those that are community based and provide substantial benefit to them.
- Establish a healthy mentoring relationship and empower youths in policy-making
- Create a youth development fund to generate grants to community based youth programs that focus on youth development
- Youth council should offer advice on matters of policy and include young people in decision-making.
- Engage youths in the civic and political process
- Create a commission to study the scope and quality of citizenship education
- Support creative and aggressive implementation of activities to get young people involved in the electoral process.
- Create an after school committee to identify best practices
- Finally, create a pilot program to involve students and youths in a simulated election – like the mock and moot trial of law faculties at the university level.

I submit here that youth activism, when applied positively, will bring positive results. When associated with violence, it points to idle hands being provided with the wrong occupation. Indeed as a matter of fact, we must believe Frantz Fanon when he tells us that each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission and fulfill it, or betray it (167).

III. THE RELEVANCE OF THE NIGERIAN YOUTH IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL (DEMOCRATIC) SYSTEM

It was quite disappointing to know that none of the members of the Federal executive council appointed by His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari has any youth included in it. The reason people often give for the exclusion of youths by the federal government is that youths are inexperienced to function as members of the federal executive council.

One begins to wonder what causes the relegation of the youths by the Nigerian political elites. The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria should and will be blamed for the total relegation of the youth in the political happenings in Nigeria. The constitutional age of becoming a president in Nigeria is 40 while 35 for senator. Putting this side by side some developed countries in the world, like France or USA that has its minimum age for becoming President as 18 and 35 respectively. Even in a third world country like India, the prime minister does not need to be older than 35. In as much that neither France nor America has produced an 18 or 35 year old president, it has given the citizen the psychological boost to participate in the politics of their countries, which makes it more democratic. These countries deliberately do it so as to encourage youth participation, which means young people can get into politics early; thereby attracting young talents into party politics and the political system at large.

In Nigeria for instance, due to the constitutional age barrier, the talented and ambitious young individuals would feel they have to use their productive years in other fields before retiring into politics. By so doing we have a bunch of leaders who lack enthusiasm for the work they do in governance because they have come to retire in politics. Due to the fact that the constitution permits 40 years as the age to contest for President, and all the presidents we have ever produced are 50 years and above. One can literally say; the higher the age barrier to elective offices, the older the people who would get into there and vice versa. In Nigeria, it is difficult to allow youths to fill party positions that has been allotted to them. For instance, in June 2014, during the party election of APC that produced John Oyegun as the party chairman, the party appointed a 52 year old man (Ibrahim Jalo) as its National youths leader. What a satire!

Obviously they were towing the path of PDP who elected a 60 year old man (Umar Garba Chiza) as its National youths leader. They have turned the youths of Nigeria to people that can be used as political touts during electioneering, or better still they place peanuts before them to cloud their sense of reasoning while they seek the high political offices.

Taking a look at the founding fathers of our great nation, one would notice that it was in their youthful age that they fought ceaselessly for the freedom of our great country from the British colony. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was born in 1909 and he ventured into politics in the 1940's. Meaning he went into politics in his 30's. Ahmadu Bello was born in 1909 and he co-founded NPC (Northern Peoples Congress) at age 40 and must have been in politics prior to that time. Nnamdi Azikiwe was born in 1904 and in 1937 he founded a Newspaper, The West Africa Pilot and within that period he co-founded NCNC (a political party). This was done in his early Thirty's. Finally on this is Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was born in 1912 and he ventured into politics in 1947 (35 years). He was elected as member of the Northern region house of Assembly. These men fought for the freedom and emancipation of this country in their youthful age. It is pathetic to know that the most recent face of the youths in a high political office was Dimeji Bankole, who was Speaker of the house of Representative at a vibrant age of 37. Instead of making a case for more youthful leadership participation by his didactic example rather he chose to tow the path of the older ones by dragging the name and dignity of the youths to the mud.

Painfully, the older politicians are not mindful of the future of the youths. When APC noticed that Nigerians were tired of PDP, and that they needed a change, they decided to go with the "change" philosophy and it helped them to remove an incumbent government, which has never happened before. Also the PDP has noticed the level of marginalization of the youths by the Buhari led government and in their quest to reclaim the political power of the country, has proposed to hand over the leadership of the party to the youths. But far more than the display of politics by the PDP, the older politicians must know that the youths must be empowered and placed in places of authority.

Our forefathers were between age bracket of 30 and 45 when they emancipated our nation. Professor Pat Utomi was between 27 and 30 years when he became the special assistant to former president Shehu Shagari. The annoying thing is that most youths in this generation who are between age 27 and 33 are still sagging their trousers or still living and depending on their parents for daily bread. What a pity to our generation!

The argument that Nigerian youths cannot lead is a big fallacy. There is a critical mass of young entrepreneurs and executives managing large portfolios in the organized private sector where the leadership determines if the business would make profit or loss. If 43 year old John F. Kennedy could inspire Americans to go to the moon, and if France- a nuclear producing country- can allow an 18 year old to run for presidency, it is complete and total lack of imagination that would make Nigeria not to trust a 35 year old as minister. Therefore,

the youths of Nigeria must stand forth and stop been used as political thugs thus killing themselves while they send their children abroad. It's high time a Nigerian youth became a top political leader. We are the leaders of today not tomorrow!

The bill "not too young to run" which has got very tremendous acceptance among Nigerian citizens caught my attention on TV a few day ago where some known civil society faces talked about the successes recorded in campaigns across the states for passage of the bill and greater space for young people to participate in politics.

Constitutional Bill

In summary, the 'not too young to run Bill' seeks to alter some Sections of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) to reduce the age of qualification for the office of the President, Governor and membership of the National Assembly. In clear terms, at 25 a Nigerian citizen is qualified to run for Houses of Assembly positions and at 30 one can run for the Governorship, Senate and Presidency. This is against the previous age benchmark of 45 and 50 or so. The Bill also seeks to allow independent candidacy in Nigeria's electoral process.

As a matter of fact, there should have been legislations for young people to participate in the country's electoral process. I think it should have been common sense that once you are eligible to vote, you can as well be voted for. The more relevant bill for me is a "too old to run bill" to set a maximum age in which one can stand for elections, this will help weed off old bags in the system and let the new contemporary generation run things in Nigeria

IV. CONCLUSION

If Emmanuel Macron at 39 won elections in France and Sebastian Kurz at 31 was sworn in as Austria Chancellor, come to think of it, these are great countries in Europe, then I believe Nigerian youth can lead the nation and retire the current coalition of septuagenarians, octogenarian and nonagenarians wasting Nigeria's resources in the name of being in positions of power.

The people that brought about the independence of Nigeria were all youths in their 20s and 30s. And by the way, Nigerian youth are not lazy, they are not depending on free oil money, they are surviving despite the terrible unemployment situation in the country. Nigerian youths are making waves in various areas of life. the list in sport, music, movies and entertainments in general is endless including the bloggers. Chimamanda Adichie is among the African internationally acclaimed writer whose novels are winning literary awards. I recently read about Sijibomi Ogundele, the 34 year old who was featured in Forbes Africa as a brave young Entrepreneur. I have a list that I cannot exhaust with this article

Now let me shock you with the following information about youths in the world politics: The President of the Supreme Political Council of Yemen-Saleh Ali al-Sammad was born on January 1, 1979. Emil Dimitriev, Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia was born on March 19, 1979. JigmeKhesar Namgyel Wangchuck was born on February 21, 1980, he is the King of Bhutan.

The Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was born on June 3, 1980. The almighty Kim Jong Un (who speaks and world trembles) was born on January 8, 1983, he is the Supreme Leader of North Korea. We may think that the world is evolving and forward looking countries are transferring leadership from the old to the young. NO, according to George Orwell, 1984. "We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it." The real truth is that young people across the world are taking power from the old. "Power is given only to him who dares to stoop and take it ... one must have the courage to dare." (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment)

I am impressed that some Nigerian youths are waking up to join politics in order to break the status quo instead of complaining on social media. I have seen a few guys indicating interest in some positions both at the states and national levels. I sincerely encourage you guys. I don't know how successful you can be amongst these predators, but just remember that "Competition is the law of the jungle, but cooperation is the law of civilization" (*Peter Kropotkin*). Finally, It is important for the youths to note that power will not be handed over to anyone on a platter.

They need to take it. One of the first things to do is to get registered as an eligible voter. Secondly, the Nigerian youth must also know that the dynamics of the Nigerian political system is still based on political parties; therefore the youths must form or join parties and actively participate as officials and active members of the parties and not thugs. I understand that the Nigerian political parties do not have ideologies, therefore personal vision, expertise; courage with strong vision will help the youth to move this country to the next level.

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