



## The Impacts of National Youth Policy on Youth Political Participation in Nigeria: An Appraisal

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### Abstract

This paper explored youth political participation and the prospects for political reforms in Nigeria, focusing on the National Youth Policy. Using the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) as the theoretical framework and utilizing a qualitative research approach, the paper analysed the historical background to youth involvement in politics in Nigeria, identifying important turning points and difficulties. It also evaluated how young people are now involved in politics, noting major impediments such as low educational attainment, social standards, political roadblocks, and restricted access to technology. The National Youth Policy was examined to determine how it would encourage young people to get involved in politics. The paper included thorough suggestions for improving young people's political participation. These included funding up-coming candidates, enhancing the standard of education, advocating for gender parity, putting electoral reforms into place, utilizing technology, and fostering involvement from civil society. Government efforts including youth development funding, capacity-building programmes, and young advisory councils were also proposed. The paper concluded by emphasizing the necessity of coordinated efforts from all stakeholders in creating an enabling environment for young people in politics. Empowering Nigerians youths to engage in politics is critical to the country's democratic progress. Implementing the recommended measures will assist in removing barriers to youth involvement and pave the path for genuine political reforms, ensuring that young Nigerians' views are heard and their contributions recognised in the democratic process.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Education, Electoral Reforms, Nigeria, Political Participation, Youth Empowerment, Youth Policy

### I. Introduction

Youth political involvement is critical for the survival of democracy. When young people participate in politics, they bring fresh perspectives and ideas. This engagement has the potential to cause enormous social and political transformations. Youth involvement in politics ensures that the interests of younger generations and their needs are taken into account during decision-making processes. In many nations, young political participation has fueled important political reforms and movements.

The most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria, has a long tradition of young political involvement. Young Nigerians have been integral to the political scene of their country from the colonial era onwards. But even with their important contributions, young people in Nigeria still have a lot of obstacles that prevent them from fully engaging in politics. These difficulties include societal and cultural hurdles, political barriers, educational impediments, and economic restrictions. This paper looked at Nigerian youth political participation and evaluated the likelihood of political reforms from the perspective of the National Youth Policy. The paper sought to address important concerns regarding the extent of youth political participation in Nigeria today, the efficacy of the National Youth Policy, and the possibility of future political reforms propelled by heightened youth involvement.

Historically, young Nigerians led the charge in the pre-independence era in the country's fight for freedom. Well-known youth movements, like the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), were



instrumental in promoting national sovereignty and self-governance (Falola & Heaton, 2008). One of the first political groups in Nigeria, the NYM was established in 1934 and drew a large number of educated and youthful Nigerians who were keen to oppose colonial rule. Nigerian youth's place in politics changed further after the country's 1960 independence. Young Nigerians actively participated in several types of resistance against military dictatorships during the military era. Youth groups and student unions frequently led demonstrations and calls for the restoration of civilian government (Nwabueze, 2003).

Youth political participation began a new chapter with the restoration of democracy in 1999. Since then, young Nigerians have persisted in getting involved in politics despite the new obstacles that come with democracy. Today's youth in Nigeria exhibit a mixed bag of emotions when it comes to their political participation. On the one hand, young people have a strong interest in politics. A large number of young people are actively engaged in voter education, political campaigns, and advocacy for good government. For instance, the 2016-founded #NotTooYoungToRun movement was successful in its efforts to modify the constitution to reduce the legal age of candidature for public office. This movement served as evidence that youth-led campaigns may bring about meaningful political change.

Nevertheless, a lot of obstacles still stand in the way of young people's political engagement. Among the biggest are the economic ones. Many young Nigerians find it difficult to participate in politics due to high unemployment rates and pervasive poverty. Most young people cannot afford to run for political office because they do not have the financial means or the established political connections of more senior politicians (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). Educational obstacles are also quite important. Due to a lack of access to high-quality education, many young Nigerians are less able to engage in politics successfully.

A crucial framework created to address some of these issues and encourage youth involvement in different facets of the country's growth, including politics, is the National Youth Policy. The objective of the policy is to enable youth, improve their abilities, and establish avenues for their proactive participation in the political process. Among other things, it contains provisions for civic engagement, work, education, and health (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). The National Youth Policy's execution has yielded inconsistent outcomes. On the

one hand, a lot of work has gone into encouraging young involvement through different projects and programmes. To promote the interests of Nigerian youth and provide them a voice in policy-making processes, for instance, the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) was established. To empower youth and promote their engagement in politics, the NYCN hosts conferences, workshops, and training courses (NYCN, 2020).

On the other hand, several issues, such as insufficient finance, shoddy execution, and a lack of cooperation among parties, have restricted the policy's influence. There is a discrepancy between the intended and actual results of the National Youth Policy due to the ineffective execution of numerous programmes and initiatives. Furthermore, a lot of young people in rural regions do not benefit from the programmes intended to support them because of the frequent mismatch between national policies and local reality (Akpokighe and Ejovi, 2020; Ibrahim, Kiiza, and Atekyereza, 2023). The chances for political reforms in Nigeria spurred by youth involvement are bright, despite the obstacles. A greater number of young people participating in politics can drastically alter the political environment. For example, the #NotTooYoungToRun movement's success shows that young people can accomplish significant political reforms provided they are motivated and organised (Itodo 2018).

Moreover, Nigeria has a bright future due to the worldwide trend towards increased youth involvement in politics. Young people have been at the vanguard of political movements that have brought about significant improvements in many different nations. For instance, the 2011 youth-led revolution in Tunisia was instrumental in overthrowing the authoritarian government and bringing in a new phase of democracy (Dalacoura, 2012). In a similar vein, if given the right chances and assistance, Nigerian youth have the power to bring about profound political change. Improving the National Youth Policy's efficacy and removing obstacles to young people's political engagement is crucial if we are to realize this potential. This entails boosting access to high-quality education, allocating sufficient funds for young initiatives, and fostering an atmosphere that is secure and supportive of political participation.

## II. Literature Review

Youth political participation has played a major role in the political, economic and social reformation of many nations (Sloam and Henn, 2019). Major political movements and



transformations in the nation have been led by the youth. Young Nigerians were instrumental in the fight for freedom from British colonial control during the pre-independence period. Established in 1934, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was among the country's first political groups. It was founded by young, intelligent Nigerians who wanted their country to be self-governing and were angry over colonial policies. Notable people including Obafemi Awolowo, H.O. Davies, and Nnamdi Azikiwe were part of the NYM (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The NYM played a pivotal role in galvanising youth to advocate for political rights and representation. Protests, marches, and educational initiatives were coordinated by the movement to increase public awareness of the need for independence. The NYM's initiatives prepared the way for the advent of other youth-led movements and established the foundation for upcoming political activism.

Nigerian youth's place in politics changed further after the country's 1960 independence. In the early years of the newly independent nation, youth were major players. Even though they were still relatively young, many of the leaders of the independence movement had important positions in the new administration. But shortly after, the political climate deteriorated as a slew of military takeovers shattered the democratic order. The military era, which started with the first coup in 1966, saw several sorts of youth involvement in politics. Youth groups and student unions rose to prominence as vocal opponents of military rule. Particularly active in planning demonstrations and pushing for the restoration of civilian rule was the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) (Nwabueze, 2003). The military administrations repressed and violently suppressed the NUNS and other youth organizations, but their unwavering activism preserved the desire for democracy. Significant youth political action took place during Nigeria's military era (1966–1999, with occasional civilian control). Students in particular, who were young in Nigeria, led the charge in the fight against the military government. Student unions organized rallies, strikes, and marches and were frequently the most outspoken opponents of military administration. The 1978 "Ali Must Go" demonstrations were one noteworthy occasion. The announcement of an increase in university fees by Colonel Ahmadu Ali, the Federal Commissioner for Education at the time, catalyzed this widespread student protest. Numerous people lost their lives in the violent altercations between students and security personnel that

characterized the protests. The demonstrations demonstrated the strength and sway of the young in Nigerian politics despite the crackdown (Jega, 2007).

Youth activism encountered several difficulties during the military regime, such as government crackdowns, detentions, and arrests. Others became instruments in the hands of the political class to propagate self-interests. Although many youths continued to contribute to the development of Nigeria in both private and public sectors, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the 1980s adversely hit many of the youths. Since then, youths have become easily manipulated with monetary incentives to pursue the self-interest of certain political classes as evident in "Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha" (YEAA) in 1998, a movement advocating for tenure elongation of the military dictator. Also, since 1999, the youth have been used to perpetuate violence during political campaigns and elections (Ogundiyaa & Baba, 2005; John et al. 2007). Young Nigerians, however, persisted in demanding the restoration of civilian authority and democratic changes. Their endeavours were important in preserving the prospect of democracy throughout times of autocratic governance.

Nigeria's youth's political participation entered a new phase with the country's return to democracy in 1999. For youth, the shift to civilian authority presented both fresh chances and difficulties (Amzat, 2016). Young Nigerians had a resurgence of interest in getting involved in politics during the early years of democracy. They did, however, confront formidable obstacles, such as poverty, political unrest, and corruption. Young people's involvement in politics started to rise despite these obstacles. A large number of young individuals joined advocacy groups, political parties, and civil society organizations. Nigeria's youth population, which accounts for a sizable share of the country's population, has begun to make an impact on politics (WFD, 2019).

In Nigeria today, youth political involvement is marked by great problems as well as enthusiasm. With about 60% of the population under 25, Nigeria has a sizable youth population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The political scene could be significantly impacted by this sizable youth population. Youth voter turnout has increased in recent elections, suggesting that young Nigerians are becoming more interested in political processes. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported that there was a



noteworthy turnout of young voters in the general elections of 2019. Between the ages of 18 and 35, 51% of voters were registered (INEC, 2019). Youth registration rates are high, which indicates that young people are interested in taking part in the political process. However, the lower-than-anticipated voter participation among adolescents who are registered to vote emphasizes the necessity for additional engagement and mobilization activities. This is made more pronounced, given that although the #NotTooYoungToRun movement lowered the age requirement to run for office, the percentage of young candidates in the 2023 elections fell from 34% to 28.8% (Tayo, 2023).

In Nigeria, several youth movements and organizations have formed to boost young people's political involvement. These organizations seek to enlighten, inspire, and enable youth to participate actively in political processes. The #NotTooYoungToRun campaign is one well-known youth-led project. This movement, which got its start in 2016, was successful in promoting a constitutional amendment that would have lowered the age limit for candidates seeking public office. The 2018 amendment lowered the age requirements for candidates running for president from 40 to 35, for governorships from 35 to 30 years, and for the House of Representatives from 30 to 25 years (Tukur, 2018). This movement's success proved how effective youth campaigning can be in promoting political change.

### Theoretical Framework

For this paper, the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) provided a suitable theoretical framework. The model proposed by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady in their classical work "Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics" (1995). Civic Voluntarism Model explains the reasons behind people's political engagement as well as the conditions that facilitate or obstruct it by identifying three factors influencing political participation - Resources, psychological involvement, and recruitment networks. Resources are time, money, and civic knowledge, all of which are necessary for people to engage in politics successfully. Political curiosity, political knowledge, and a sense of political efficacy are what drive people to get involved in politics; these factors are referred to as psychological engagement. Participation in recruitment networks is contingent upon being invited by family, friends, or organizations,

underscoring the significance of social connections in politics.

The application of the CVM to Nigerian youth political participation in Nigeria enabled the comprehension of how their political participation is impacted by societal and cultural norms (influencing psychological engagement), educational deficits (causing a lack of civic skills and political awareness), and economic constraints (causing a lack of resources). The approach also highlighted the significance of recruitment networks, which can be enhanced by mentorship programmes and community involvement. We can pinpoint particular initiatives to increase young people's political engagement in Nigeria by using the CVM. Enhancing educational possibilities has the potential to augment civic abilities, whereas financial help can furnish the requisite resources. To increase psychological participation, political interest and efficacy can be promoted through awareness campaigns, and recruitment networks should be strengthened to guarantee that youth are invited and motivated to join in political processes.

### The National Youth Policy (NYP)

Nigeria's National Youth Policy (NYP) is a strategic framework created to meet the needs and goals of youth. The NYP was originally implemented in Nigeria in 2001, and it has since undergone adjustments to take into account shifting circumstances and new issues that young people are facing. A comprehensive plan to empower young Nigerians and integrate them into the nation's socioeconomic and political fabric is outlined in the most recent version, which was revised in 2019 (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). The policy aims to create an atmosphere that is supportive of youth development, acknowledging the vital role that young play in the development of the country. It covers a range of topics related to young people's development, such as political engagement, work, education, and health. The NYP seeks to establish a supportive atmosphere that encourages young leadership and involvement.

#### a. Key Components and Objectives of NYP

The NYP comprises several key components designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people in Nigeria. These components include:

1. **Education and Skill Development:** The policy emphasizes the importance of quality education and vocational training. It aims to equip young people with the necessary skills to compete in the global economy. This includes improving access



to education, enhancing the quality of teaching, and promoting technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

2. **Employment and Economic Empowerment:** The NYP seeks to address the high unemployment rates among Nigerian youth. It promotes entrepreneurship and job creation through various initiatives. These include support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), access to microcredit, and training in business management.

3. **Health and Well-being:** The policy highlights the need for accessible healthcare services for young people. It addresses issues such as sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and substance abuse. The NYP promotes health education and the provision of youth-friendly health services.

4. **Political Participation and Civic Engagement:** A significant focus of the NYP is to enhance youth participation in politics and decision-making processes. It encourages young people to engage in civic activities, join political parties, and run for office. The policy also advocates for the inclusion of youth in governance structures at all levels.

5. **Social Inclusion and Equity:** The NYP aims to promote social inclusion and equity for all young people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. It seeks to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable youth groups.

#### b. Role of Government and Stakeholders

Several parties, including government agencies, youth organizations, the commercial sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), must actively participate in the NYP's implementation for it to be successful. Supervising the NYP's execution is the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, which is the principal government agency. It works in tandem with other ministries, including labour, health, and education, to guarantee a well-coordinated approach to youth development. NGOs and civil society groups are essential in promoting youth concerns and offering assistance in the execution of policies. These organizations frequently provide advocacy, mentoring, and training services while working one-on-one with youth. They ensure that young people's views are heard and their needs are met by bridging the gap between the government and the youth.

The NYP's implementation also involves a large amount of private sector involvement. Companies may help by giving young people access to jobs, internships, and apprenticeships. They can also contribute to youth-led businesses and encourage

entrepreneurial endeavours. In the course of implementation, youth movements and organizations are crucial collaborators. They keep the government responsible for its promises, educate the public about the NYP, and organise youth. These groups ensure that conversations and decision-making processes about policies take into account the opinions of young people.

#### c. Impact and Effectiveness

The impact and effectiveness of the NYP can be assessed by examining its outcomes in various areas of youth development. While the policy has made some positive strides, several challenges remain.

**Education and Skill Development:** The NYP has helped to increase the number of people who can now attend education and career training. Opportunities for career advancement and skill development have been made possible by several government programmes, including the N-Power programme and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). However, there are still issues with education quality, and many young Nigerians do not have access to high-quality training and education (Obeza, 2023).

**Employment and Economic Empowerment:** Programmes designed to assist young entrepreneurs have been established as a result of the NYP's emphasis on entrepreneurship and job development. Young entrepreneurs have received financial support and training from programmes like the Nigerian Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) and the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN!). Even with these initiatives, there is still a large youth unemployment rate, and many young people have difficulty securing good, steady jobs (Ariyo, 2023).

**Health & Well-Being:** The NYP has encouraged the provision of youth-friendly health services and assisted in increasing public awareness of youth health issues. Substance misuse, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health have all been the subject of adopted programmes. More work is necessary to guarantee that all young Nigerians have access to full health coverage, as access to healthcare services is still restricted in many locations (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019).

**Civic Engagement and Political Participation:** The NYP has made great progress in encouraging young people to get involved in politics. The #NotTooYoungToRun movement's success is evidence of the policy's influence in this regard. A constitutional amendment that lowered the



age limit for holding public office has prompted an increase in the number of young individuals involved in politics. But obstacles including poverty, political unrest, and corruption still prevent people from fully participating (Eneji and Ikeorji, 2018; Akinyetun, 2021; Okebe, 2022).

**Social Inclusion and Equity:** The NYP has prioritized social inclusion and equity, which has resulted in the implementation of programmes meant to combat prejudice and advance equal opportunity. Although there have been programmes aimed at disadvantaged and marginalized youth groups, more work is required to guarantee that these efforts benefit all young people. Regional differences and gender inequality continue to be major obstacles (Agbalajobi, 2010).

### **Assessment of Youth Political Participation in Nigeria**

These case studies below highlight the experiences of young Nigerians who have successfully engaged in politics and made significant contributions to political reforms. By analyzing these examples, we can better understand the impact of youth involvement in politics and identify strategies for enhancing their participation.

#### **(1) Not-Too-Young-To-Run Movement**

One of the most well-known instances of successful youth-led political activism in Nigeria is the #NotTooYoungToRun movement. Young activists who wanted to reduce the age limit for standing for political office started this movement in 2016. The campaign's goal was to eliminate constitutional restrictions that kept young Nigerians from actively engaging in the political process (Oloyede, 2022). All over the nation, there was strong support for the movement. To gain support and increase awareness, it employed advocacy campaigns, public demonstrations, and social media. The leaders of the movement lobbied for constitutional reforms with legislators, political parties, and civil society organizations.

The Not Too Young to Run Act, which was passed in 2018, reduced the age requirements for the office of the president from 40 to 35 years old, the House of Representatives from 30 to 25 years old, and the state house of assembly from 30 to 25 years old. Nigeria's general election of 2023 will be its second since then (Tukur, 2018). Nigeria's youths should be commended for making the most of their influence to alter the political system through constitutional amendments. Nigeria struggled with low youth representation in

elective positions before passing the Act. Three lawmakers, or 0.3% of the total number of elected legislators in the House of Representatives in 2015, were under the age of thirty-five. In state houses of assembly, the percentage was higher, with 57 young people (6%) holding seats out of 993 state constituency seats. A gradual but notable shift in the 2019 elections was signaled by the fact that youth (25–35 years old) occupied 3% of House of Representatives seats and 8% of state legislature seats, thanks to the #NotTooYoungToRun initiative.

A review of the 2023 election candidate list shows that the percentage of young candidates has decreased from 34% in the general election of 2019 to 28.6% in 2023. While constituting the largest demographic (37.7%) on the national voter registration, young people were underrepresented among the candidates on the ballot. In contrast to the 2015 and 2019 elections, there was a minor improvement in the representation of young people in the legislature in 2023, despite the reduction in youth candidatures. Itodo (2023) argues that this viewpoint can be explained by three prominent developments in young people's political participation.

First, compared to executive posts or national assembly seats, political parties were more likely to field young candidates for state legislative seats during the previous three election cycles. The political reality indicates that state legislative posts provide greater opportunities for young individuals to run for and win elections, notwithstanding the competitive character of state-level races. Second, even though the national voter registration is dominated by young people, youth turnout is rarely influenced by young candidates. Third, youthful candidates backed by well-established political parties have a higher chance of winning than those supported by parties with less history (Itodo, 2023).

#### **(2) The Role of Young Women in Politics**

Cultural traditions and prejudice based on gender present extra obstacles for young women in Nigeria who want to participate in politics. Since 2011, women's presence in Nigerian politics has generally decreased, and the results of the 2023 elections in the continent's largest economy supported predictions that women would not do well (Nkereuwem, 2023). In Nigeria, women presently make up 4% of the House of Representatives and 3% of the Senate, respectively, after a 19% decline in their numbers during the previous parliament (Nkereuwem, 2023). It is possible to comprehend the low performance of Nigerian women in the recent elections by looking at the obstacles and



difficulties that female candidates and aspirants experienced in the 2022 primary elections. The outcomes of the primary elections for the various parties show the persistent barriers to women's representation in Nigerian politics. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the nation has the tenth-lowest percentage of women in national parliaments worldwide. Despite nearly equal voter registration rates for men and women in previous election cycles, there is still a representation problem (INEC, 2023).

However, several young women have become well-known political personalities and activists for gender equality despite these challenges. Aisha Yesufu, a well-known activist and co-founder of the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) movement, is one noteworthy example. The Chibok schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram, and the BBOG campaign, which was started in 2014, campaigned for their rescue (Zagi, 2024). Because Yesufu spearheaded this effort, the world saw the misery of the kidnapped girls and realized that Nigerian girls needed greater protection and education. Yesufu has also made a strong case for women to participate in politics more actively. She has spoken out against discrimination and violence against women based on their gender and encouraged young women to get involved in politics. Numerous young women have been motivated to participate in political processes and advocate for their rights through her efforts.

### (3) Youth in Local Government Politics

The local government offers a big platform for youth to get involved in politics. Engaging in local politics gives young people the opportunity to directly influence decisions that touch their communities. Mahmood (2023), who said that young people in Nigeria need to be inspired to take part in local government elections by casting ballots, joining political parties, or seeking for office, concurred with this statement. By doing this, individuals can contribute to reviving the political scene with new viewpoints, creative concepts, and vigour.

Rinsola Abiola's story is one of successful youth involvement in local governance. The late MKO Abiola's daughter Rinsola was engaged in politics at an early age. She worked for the Speaker of the House of Representatives as a Special Assistant for New Media. In this capacity, she attempted to close the communication gap between youth and legislators by interacting with them on social media and other venues. In the 2019 elections, Abiola also campaigned for a seat in the

House of Representatives. Her candidature demonstrated the possibility for youth involvement in political politics even though she did not win. Her actions inspired other young Nigerians to seek political careers by highlighting the significance of having young people represented in government. Increasing the number of young people voting in municipal elections can contribute to the development of a more accountable and representative democracy. It can also encourage the creation of inclusive and youth-focused policies.

### (4) Student Unions and Campus Politics

Future political leaders in Nigeria have traditionally come from student unions and university politics. Young people can participate in political activities, hone their leadership abilities, and fight for their rights in universities and colleges. The West African Student Union (WASU), which was partially founded by Nigerian students in London, was the forerunner of the Students' Union in Nigeria. Led by Solanke and Bankole-Bright, WASU fought for better welfare for all students in London, and their influence in Nigeria resulted in the founding of NUNS (National Union of Nigerian Students), which later became NANS (National Association of Nigerian Students), which now has branches in all Nigerian tertiary institutions through SUGs (Student Union Governments). The WASU fought the colonial masters for the rights and emancipation of Africans from colonial tutelage. The Student Union and WASU collaborated as a platform of change and informed activism (Okeke, 2010).

The Nigerian Students' Union was dedicated to the welfare of all Nigerian citizens, not only students. As a result, leftist intellectuals and academics supported the union. According to Wonah (2023), the union leaders were firebrands who were genuine idealists. Under Segun Okeowo's direction, NUNS entered national politics to ensure that Nigerian students received adequate money for their education (Okeke, 2010). Despite facing various forms of mistreatment, Nigerian students under NUNS remained steadfast in their belief that they are opposing the forces of authoritarianism, parochialism, and feudalism inside our political system (Okeke, 2010).

The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) involvement in political activity is one noteworthy example. NANS has been crucial in promoting student rights and tackling problems including rising tuition, subpar facilities, and academic freedom. To address these issues, the group has planned talks with government



representatives, rallies, and strikes. Numerous well-known Nigerian activists and politicians got their start in student government. For instance, Philip Shaibu, a former deputy governor of Edo State and member of the House of Representatives, was heavily involved in student unionism during his university years. The late Gani Fahewinmi led a student union and later ran for president of Nigeria in 2007. His early experiences in student politics helped shape his political career and advocacy for workers' rights

#### (5) Youth and Electoral Participation

Election engagement by young people is essential to the democratic process. Young voters can influence election results because they comprise a sizable fraction of the electorate. However, due to several issues, such as lack of access to voter registration and disenchantment with the political system, youth voter turnout has frequently lagged behind expectations. Voting in Nigeria begins at the age of eighteen, however, there are several age requirements to run for elected office: forty for the President, thirty for the Senate and Governor, and twenty-five for Representative and State Assembly (Okibe, 2022). Being excluded from elective jobs contributes to the fundamental instability of the economy and is not solely a result of the legal age requirement. The youth exclusion situation has been made worse by the monetization of election processes, which benefits older, wealthier individuals or those who receive funds from political sponsors (Onyeizu, 2019). Older politicians influence political parties at the expense of younger ones due to the godfather and moneybag roles they play as well as the lack of internal party democracy (Cheeseman, Bertrand and Husaini, 2019; Agi, 2022). Regretfully, the government does not offer a venue for young people to be integrated into political posts.

Although the 2010 Nigerian Electoral Act, as revised in February 2022, set a cap on campaign finances, it did not restrict the excesses of political parties in terms of the amounts they demanded for nomination forms, which reduces the political space available to young people (Itodo, 2022). More and more young people are unable to afford the "Expression of Interest" and "Nomination Forms" required by political parties to be considered for an election race, as these costs have increased since 2011. Even with the 50% discount for women and young people, the cost of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) nomination forms for the 2023 elections alone was so high that it destroyed young people's dreams of

running for office (Ani, 2022; Premium Times, 2022). Rich politicians can afford to pay for this, turning politics into a cash-and-carry business. Due to the push and pull of some overly ambitious young people to turn to crime to become wealthy, join the league of moneybaggers, and start claiming influence and authority in the political system, this behaviour creates a revolving door for corruption in political offices (Edeme, 2022).

Numerous campaigns to promote young voting participation have been started in response to these problems. The Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement (YIAGA) is one such programme. A youth-led group called YIAGA seeks to advance young involvement in politics and democratic governance. The group has put in place many initiatives to support electoral reforms, monitor elections, and inform young voters (YIAGA, 2018). The "Watching the Vote" initiative by YIAGA was essential in encouraging accountability and openness in the electoral process for the 2019 general elections. To keep an eye on the elections and report on any anomalies, the campaign sent out over 3,000 observers. More young people were inspired to vote by this programme, which also contributed to increasing public trust in the electoral system (YIAGA, 2019).

#### Challenges and Barriers to Youth Political Participation in Nigeria

Youth political participation in Nigeria faces many challenges. These barriers limit the ability of young people to engage fully in political processes.

##### (1) Economic Barriers

In Nigeria, one of the biggest barriers to young people participating in politics is the economy. Many young people in Nigeria are impacted by high unemployment rates and pervasive poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reports that Nigeria's young unemployment rate exceeds 30%. Due to their struggles to achieve their fundamental requirements, many young people place less importance on getting involved in politics. Obtaining significant financial resources is necessary to run for political office. There are registration, publicity, travel, and other fees associated with campaigns. The inability of many young people to pay these expenses prevents them from running for government (Odo & Obani, 2010). Furthermore, as they are more concerned with protecting their livelihoods, young people are deterred from entering politics by unstable economies and unstable employment.





#### (2) Educational Barriers

Having access to a good education is essential for engaging in politics with knowledge. Many young Nigerians, nevertheless, do not obtain a sufficient education. Nigeria's education system suffers issues such as inadequate money, subpar facilities, and a shortage of qualified educators (Obaze, 2023). Many young people have restricted access to educational opportunities and poor literacy rates as a result of these concerns. To comprehend and take part in political processes, one must possess political literacy. Many young Nigerians lack the education necessary to participate in politics successfully. They may lack the expertise required to comprehend political matters, participate in discussions, and reach well-informed conclusions. Their inability to participate in the democratic process stems from their lack of political knowledge.

#### (3) Societal and Cultural Barriers

In Nigeria, social and cultural norms have a big impact on how little young people participate in politics. Gender norms and traditional expectations frequently dissuade young people—especially young women—from getting involved in politics. There is a widespread belief that older males should not work in politics (Makama, 2013; Eze and Mark, 2023). Young people may encounter opposition from their communities and families if they want to pursue political careers. For young women, gender inequality is a major obstacle. Social demands and cultural expectations present them with additional difficulties. For instance, worries about their safety and cultural expectations of marriage and family responsibilities may deter young women from pursuing careers in politics (Agbalajobi, 2010). This cultural bias limits the opportunities available to young women and reduces their participation in politics.

#### (4) Political Barriers

Youth participation in Nigeria is severely hampered by the political climate. The main challenges include political violence, corruption, and limited access to political networks. Intimidation and violence are frequent features of Nigerian elections, discouraging many young people from taking part. Young people are discouraged from participating in politics because they fear violence and the possibility of harm to their safety (Amanyie, Lucky, and Kia, 2015). Another significant obstacle is corruption.

#### (5) Legal and Institutional Barriers

Youth political engagement is also impacted by institutional and legal restrictions. Other institutional and legal impediments also exist, despite the #NotTooYoungToRun movement's successful advocacy for decreasing the age restriction for political office. For instance, the expensive nomination paperwork and the convoluted election procedure may deter young people from entering politics (Itodo, 2022). Their engagement is further restricted by the absence of youth-friendly policies and initiatives. Youth concerns are frequently not given priority by government institutions, and there are few safeguards in place to guarantee that young people are represented in decision-making processes. Policies that fail to take into account the unique demands and difficulties that young people encounter are the outcome of this institutional neglect.

### III. Conclusion

In Nigeria, youth engagement in politics is essential to the growth of democracy in the nation. This paper looked at the National Youth Policy's historical background, present situation, and efforts to engage young people in politics. Empirical researches from various nations demonstrated that substantial political transformations can result from the active engagement of the young. Numerous obstacles impede the involvement of young people in Nigeria. These consist of political barriers, social and cultural standards, lack of education, economic restrictions, and restricted access to technology. Positive chances exist for political reforms despite these obstacles. A more inclusive political climate can be produced through government initiatives, legislative modifications, the involvement of civil society, and the effects of technology.

Therefore, this paper is an exploration of the issue of youth political participation in Nigeria which revealed that Nigeria's political system is frequently characterized by the power of long-standing political elites and corruption. It's challenging for young people to negotiate this atmosphere if they don't have the necessary financial means and political contacts. They might have trouble getting on political platforms and participating in decision-making procedures. Furthermore, the influence of youth is limited by their underrepresentation in political parties and governmental institutions. Older politicians who are hesitant to share power with younger members and who are averse to change



frequently control political parties. Advocating for their interests and influencing policies are made harder for young people whose participation in decision-making processes is restricted.

To overcome some of the barriers and challenges identified, the paper suggested the following:

1. It's critical to improve young people's access to economic possibilities in Nigeria to address the economic hurdles. More employment possibilities, vocational training, and financial support for individuals wishing to run for public office are a few examples of how to do this. Reducing poverty and unemployment will free up more youth time for political engagement.

2. Overcoming educational obstacles requires improving the educational system. This entails giving schools more money, making facility improvements, and hiring more instructors with the necessary qualifications. Better education increases the likelihood that young people will comprehend political concerns and participate in political discourse. Improving their ability to make informed judgements and engage in politics can also be achieved by increasing political literacy through educational initiatives.

3. Social norms and cultural expectations must change to address societal and cultural impediments. It is vital to support gender equality and the notion that young people can succeed in politics. Young individuals who want to get into politics, especially young women, should have the backing of their families and communities. Increasing the engagement of young women in politics can be achieved by addressing gender inequalities and guaranteeing their safety.

4. Establishing a more secure and welcoming political environment is necessary to remove political hurdles. Encouraging young people to engage in politics requires reducing political violence and corruption. Ensuring youth have access to political venues and networks can assist them in participating in decision-making. Institutions and political parties ought to accept younger members and be flexible. Young people may feel more empowered as a result to influence policy and speak out for their interests.

5. Simplifying the election process and bringing down the cost of nomination forms can help lower legal and institutional barriers. Youth-friendly policies and activities should take into account the unique needs and difficulties that young people confront. Institutions of government must give priority to issues about youth and make sure that their voices are heard when making

decisions. Young people can participate more actively in politics and advance their nation by removing these obstacles.

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