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Perception of Nigerian Youths on the 'Not Too Young to Run' Campaign

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Abstract:

There is no gainsaying that youths are great assets that any nation can tap. They are the future of the nation; they are equally potential investment for a country's development. The 'Not Too Young to Run' campaign is aimed at giving constitutional opportunities to the youths to vie for political offices. However, it is important for the youth to be aware of this campaign. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to investigate the perception of Nigerian youths on the not too young to run campaign. This study examined perception of youths on the Not Too Young to Run Campaign. Youths in Offa Local Government were used as study. In conducting this study, four objectives were set which led to the adoption of survey research method as research design. Questionnaire was the instrument used in gathering data. The analysis of the data gathered reveals the following, that: the level of awareness of the youths on the 'Not Too Young to Run' campaign is high, majority of the respondents consider the 'Not Too Young to Run' Law passed by the National Assembly as an excellent law. Funding and fear of violence are the major barriers to the political participation of the youths in Nigeria politics. This study therefore recommends that the youths should be encouraged by giving them slots of political posts by political parties. Youths occupying political offices should try to make good use of their offices to serve humanity. Political campaigns should be regulated so as to reduce fund involved in campaigns during elections.

Keywords: Perception, Nigerian youths, campaign

1. Introduction

The 'Not Too Young to Run' is a campaign which seeks to reduce the age limit for running for elected offices in Nigeria and globally. The campaign is aimed at giving constitutional opportunities to the youths to vie for political offices. However, it is important for the youth to be aware of this campaign. Also, the readiness of the youths to occupy political leadership posts with the intention of service to humanity could form the perception of the youths towards the campaign. The campaign started in support of bills and motions in Nigeria's National Assembly sponsored by Tony Nwulu in the House of Representatives and Abdul Aziz Nyako in the Senate. The campaign is now global, symbolized by the hashtag #NotTooYoungToRun.

The age reduction law popularly known as 'Not Too Young To Run' Law is a constitutional amendment movement led by young Nigerians. The bill was conceived by a civil society group known as YIAGA Africa in May 2016. The group is headed by Samson Itodo, a human right activist and good governance campaigner who is the Executive Director of YIAGA Africa. The bill sought alteration in sections 65, 106, 131, 177 of the Constitution of Nigeria, which reduced the age of running for elective positions for House of Assembly and House of Representatives from 30 years old to 25 years old, Senate and Governorship from 35 years old to 30 years old and office of the president from 40 to 30 and independent candidature in Nigeria (Adaoyiche, 2017).

It is an undisputed fact that the youths are the backbone of any society; they are as well the most disadvantaged group based on the way most societies are stratified. In developing countries for instance, frequent socio-political unrest are associated with youth restiveness while on the other hand, the youth in developed countries are seen as catalyst of development. The downward trend in developing countries is attributed to poverty which is pervasive and traced to socio economic structures in Africa and long years of economic extraction, economic dependence, imperialism and long military rules (Maiangwa 2009).

Certainly, the roles of youths in Nigeria's democratic development should go beyond mere voting at elections to genuine and concrete political participation. By this idea, therefore, youths should be involved in the choosing (freely) of those to govern them; contribute their quarter in decision making and implementation; and freely express their opinions (i.e. assess, commend or criticize) on government policies (Dalhatu, Muhammed and Oyigbenu, 2010).

Political participation is differently explained as the active involvement of citizens in matters of political interest which include formation and implementation of public policies, voting, contesting for political office, campaigning for a political party, contributing to community projects, lobbying for government projects, organizing demonstrations and expressing grievances even through violence (Oddih and Emeka, 2006).

Therefore, there are two dominant ways that youths can participate or contribute to the political advancement of their society. It can be through rational or acceptable means such as voting, contesting and expressing group opinion; or it can take unconventional (non-rational) means such as violent demonstration. The way and manner which people choose to participate in politics is the function of the nature and orientation of the political system. However, for democratic sustainability in Nigeria, the rational/conventional means is the most preferred which the youths should choose (Dalhatu, Muhammed and Oyigbenu, 2010).

Thus, meaningful youth political participation involves recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for youths to become involved in political decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels. A basic concept of participation however, is that people are free to involve themselves in social and developmental processes and that self-involvement is active, voluntary and informed (Aniagoh, 2016). The claim that youths are the leaders of tomorrow has been on for long, with the campaign on the need to give chance to the youths to be part of policymakers in Nigeria, there is a need to examine the perception of the youths on this campaign. That is what this study set out to achieve.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

While it is believed that the passage of the Not Too Young To Run Bill into law by the National Assembly has ultimately given greater opportunities for Nigerian youths to participate actively in Nigerian politics such as vying for political office, Omilusi and Adefemi (2016) argued that the paradox of the Nigerian situation is that the Nigerian government subscribes to many international instruments on the desirability of popular participation in development. In spite of beautiful declarations, there is not much on ground to suggest that the Nigerian State is willing to allow for popular participation in government. What is difficult to understand is why a government that claims to be democratic would find it difficult to accommodate dissenting and divergent views in the management of common affairs.

Would this mean that the 'Not Too Young To Run Law' would still not change the fortune of the youths in the Nigerian political space? How do the youths view the enactment of the law? Is it going to be business as usual? A situation where 50 years and above are the youth leaders. These and many other questions call for this study.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To find out the level of awareness of the youths on the Not Too Young To Run Law
- To examine their opinion on the Not Too Young To Run campaign and the Nigerian political system
- To find out their level of political participation
- To identify barriers to youths' political participation aside from age limit

1.3. Research Questions

- What is the level of awareness of the youths on the Not Too Young To Run Law?
- What are their opinions on the Not Too Young To Run campaign and the Nigerian political system?
- What is their level of political participation?
- What are the barriers to youths' political participation aside from age limit?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Understanding of Youth

Youth is a broad based concept that encompasses so many definitions but this paper will try as much as possible to stay with the conventional international definition. Just as it is difficult to define some social concepts in the same manner biological classification places limitations in classifying youth within a social context (Maiangwa and Adamu, 2012).

Youth as a social concept underscore personality attributes; high mental wellbeing, skill, energy, astuteness, strength, readiness, exploration, adventurism, among others. It denotes that certain age bracket, 14-28 possesses certain abilities that are peculiar to them. Youths according to the United Nations (UN) are those persons between the age of 15 and 24 years. This definition considers children as person under the age of 14. However under the Rights of The Child persons up to the age of 18 are defined as children (The Youth and the United Nations 2010). The broader use of the term underscores the need for policies and programmes to focus less on age and more on recognizing the specific development needs of people as they transit from childhood to adulthood (UN 2010). In Nigeria's National Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action, youth is defined as persons between 18-35 years of age who is a citizen of Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2001). By this therefore youth can be any person on the stage of transition to adulthood who also is dependent on others for means of survival, shelter and other necessities of life (Maiangwa and Adamu, 2012).

2.2. Youth Participation in Nigerian Politics

In a simple approach, political participation is citizens' involvement in the acts, events or activities that influence the selection of and/or the actions taken by political representatives. It refers to the various mechanisms through which

the public express their political views and, and/or exercise their influence on the political process (Chatora 2012). Abubakar (2011) sees it as the involvement of people, (not necessarily active) in any political process before a collective decision is arrived. In other words, political participation entails citizens' engagement in the discourse of socio-political and economic issues which serve as yardsticks for choosing would be leaders.

Nigerian youths are essential component in the political stability of the country; they have been playing crucial role in sustaining democracy by virtue of participation. Beginning from the decolonization period through to independence, Nigerian youths have played significant roles that cannot be ignored. They fought racial discrimination in place of work and demand equal payment of wages to the blacks during the colonial era. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, late Mal. Aminu Kano, and Sa'adu Zungeru among others stood against the colonial administration and demanded equal treatment with their colonial counterparts. As a result, some lost their jobs in the railway corporation which was the larger employer of labour and some others fled the country because their lives were threatened. In the contemporary period, Nigerian youths are contending with the inherited colonial institutions that give recognition to only those that possessed economic power. The dependent nature of the Nigerian economy and the clientele or gate keeper status of the political class and their perpetual struggle for political power has continuously put the youths at a receiving end (Maiangwa and Adamu, 2012).

Many youths have equally lost their lives on the verge of demanding for democratic governance and opposition to a stereotype Western enforced economic programme-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s. Nigerians are enjoying democracy today because the youths stood against dictatorial leadership style of three military dictators-Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida and Gen. Sani Abacha in the 1980s and 1990s. Nigerian students under the umbrella of National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) fought the military regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida in the 1980s in various campuses where the dictator proscribed the students associations in 1987 and de-proscribed it again (Maiangwa and Adamu, 2012).

Also, the youths have been active in Nigerian democracy since 1999. Within the political parties' recognition have been accorded to the youths where political parties have established youth wings to sell the manifesto of their parties. There is no gain saying that youths are great assets that any nation can tap. They are the future of the nation; they are equally potential investment for a country's development. A country can produce as well as nurture or sustain itself through the youths as the future of the country depends on them (Maiangwa and Adamu, 2012).

To bring about the desired change, Nigerian youths today must break away from and live above those colonial created and imposed deformities and fragmentations, perpetuated by the present political elites to be able to advance its weak position and weak economic strength. Ethnic chauvinism, religious sentiments, tribal and communal clashes, cultural differentiations and gender discriminations are setbacks that the youths must contend with today. Adejoh (2010) observed that these compound the problems of stability and development. The youths should no longer wait for government to protect their interests, they must go beyond government to explore opportunities created in this current democratic project to provide a strong national association that would serve as strong pressure group and a lobby group to advance their interest in the executive arm of government and the National Assembly at the state and federal levels. Such association would make its influence felt in all local governments of Nigeria.

The Nigerian state can guarantee democratic stability through integration of the youths into main stream decision making process of government as they form the critical sector of the socio-economic and political development of the nation. As a matter of desirability and necessity, there is urgent need to revisit the initial and dormant national policy on youths. This policy must take cognizance of the past state policies that discriminates against the youths by making education and vocational training for the youths free at all levels (Maiangwa and Adamu, 2012).

Challenges to the Participation of Youths in Democracy for Leadership

According to Dalhatu, Mohammed and Oyigbenu (2010), the youths in Nigeria have some challenges working against their efforts to occupy elective positions in Nigeria. These impediments include: illiteracy. This has been a major setback to the ability of the youths to support and sustain genuine democratic processes. A considerable number of them are brainwashed and indoctrinated by the politicians to see their role in the democratic growth as thugs or political gangsters. Their illiteracy status is been exploited by desperate politicians at the detriment of the youths and the young state.

Another setback to youth participation in politics is unemployment and poverty. Lack of employment, which in most cases is attributed to lack of education, normally breeds poverty amongst the youths. UNDP (2001) avers that, 'the number of youths who are out of work and out of school either as graduates or drop-out ----- are increasingly worrisome.' Perhaps, there is link between unemployment and poverty and the roles youths are playing in the democratisation process in Nigeria. This means that joblessness and poverty pose a serious threat to the survival of the youths and their ability to play their expected roles in sustaining the nascent democracy in the state. Invariably, this has compelled them to engage in any dirty and unhealthy kind of work, the common of which is political gangster.

Lack of formidable and genuine youth organisation and leadership has also been identified as a challenge to youth participation in politics. Most youths do not form a vibrant youth organisation that can pursue youth development policies and support the bid to substantive and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. Where there are so called youth organisations, they are spearheaded by elders in the disguise of youth. Thus, this can be proven by the fact that most of the heads of youth organisations are persons aged above 40 or sometimes even 60 plus (Raman, 2007). This situation has been affecting the roles of youths in supporting and sustaining democracy in Nigeria.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Democratic Participant Theory. This theory seeks the democratization of the media for accessibility by all and sundry. The theory simply lays emphasis on the need for popular participation and plurality in the access to media. The baseline of this theory is that, every individual (man and woman) and every part of the society should have access to the media so that they can air their views about happenings in the society. Through this they are automatically exercising their rights to self-determination.

The theory warns that media should not be left in the hands of professionals alone. Professionals may not succeed if they do not consider the needs and interests of the audience. According to Asemah (2011), the democratic participant media theory stresses the need for access and rights to communication by all. It calls for horizontal in place of the top down communication, which is a concern for feedback, socio-political communication, and an acknowledgement of the feedback so as to realize the completed communication circuit. Everyone in the society is to have access to the media. Going by this theory, the electorates, especially the youths have right to access the media and rights to be served based on their needs, these needs include the desire to participate in politics and be given equal space in the political parties. The content of the media should also not be subjected to political or state controls; rather it should be for the audience. In communication, especially in political communication, the media should not be used only by political aspirants to air their manifestos but also to voice the needs of the electorates, especially the youths.

2.4. Method of Study

The survey research method was adopted for this study. This method was used because it is suitable for eliciting the response of youths in Offa metropolis concerning the objectives of this study. The researchers used the questionnaire as an instrument of data collection. The area of study was Offa metropolis. The populations of this study are the youths in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State. According to the National Population Census (2006), 23,112 is the official figure for those within the ages of 18 to 35 years in Offa (National Population Commission, 2006).

2.5. Sample and Sampling Techniques

Two sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. These were the purposive sampling procedure and simple random sampling. The researchers purposively chose the population of study because, it allows for the deliberate selection of the elements that made up the sample (Offa youths); the simple random sampling was used to randomly select 400 respondents. To determine the sample size, Taro Yamane model was used as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$1 + N(e)^2$$

n = Sample

N = Population size under study

I = Unit in value (always constant)

e = Estimated standard error margin of 0.05

$$n = \frac{23,112}{1 + 23,112(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{1 + 23,112(0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{1 + 57.78}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{58.78}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{58.78}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{58.78}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{58.78}$$

$$= \frac{23,112}{58.78}$$

$$n = 400$$

Therefore, n = 400

Thus, 400 youths formed the sample size of this study.

2.6. Presentation of Data

A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered for this study and all were properly answered and returned thus, representing 100% return rate.

Age Range	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18-24yrs	132	33%
25-30yrs	168	42%
30-35years	100	25%
Total	400	100%

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2018

As shown in the above table, 132 respondents (33%) were between the ages of 18-24 years, 168 respondents (42%) were between the ages of 25-30years, while 101 respondents (25%) were between the 30-35years.

Source	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	354	88.5%
No	46	11.5%
Total	400	100%

Table 2: Respondents' View on Awareness of 'Not Too Young to Run' Campaign?

Source: Field Survey, 2018

As shown in the above table, 354 respondents (88.5%) are aware of the 'Not Too Young to Run' campaign while 46 respondents (11.5%) were not aware of the campaign.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Excellent	204	51%
Good	126	31.5%
Fair	58	14.5%
Bad	12	3%
Total	400	100%

Table 3: Respondents' View on the 'Not Too Young to Run' Law

Source: Field Survey, 2018

The above table shows that 204 respondents (51%) said the law is excellent, 126 respondents (31.5%) said good, 58 respondents (14.5%) said fair while 12 respondents (3%) said bad.

Level of Influence	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Voting in elections	245	61.3%
Contesting in elections	21	5.3%
Voicing your opinion in public issues	154	38.5%
Total	400	100%

Table 4: Responses on Why Respondents Participate in the Political Affairs of Nigeria

Source: Field Survey, 2018

The above table shows that 245 respondents (61.3%) participate in the political affairs of Nigeria through voting in elections, 21 respondents (5.3%) participate in the political affairs of Nigeria through contesting in elections while 154 respondents (38.5%) participate in the political affairs of Nigeria through voicing their opinion in public issues.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	22	5.5%
Agree	20	5%
Strongly disagree	28	7%
Disagree	31	7.8%
Neutral	299	74.8%
Total	400	100%

Table 5: Responses on Whether the Passing of the 'Not Too Young to Run' Bill into Law Will

Increase the Political Participation of Youths

Source: Field Survey, 2018

From the above table, 22 respondents (5.5%) strongly agreed that enactment of the law will increase the political participation of youths, 20 respondents (5%) agreed, 28 respondents (7%) strongly disagreed, 31 respondents (7.8%) d disagreed while 299 respondents (74.8%) were neutral.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	297	74.3%
No	103	25.7%
Total	400	100%

Table 6: Responses on Whether There Are Other Factors Discouraging the

Youths from Political Participation Aside from Age Limit

Source: Field Survey, 2018

From the above table, 297 respondents (74.3%) said there are other factors discouraging the youths from political participation while 103 respondents (25.7%) said there are no other factors discouraging the youths from political participation.

3. Discussion of Findings

Based on the data analyzed, it can be seen that majority of the respondents (88.5%) are aware of the 'Not Too Young to Run' Campaign. This shows that the level of awareness is high. In describing the law, the average respondents (51%) said it is an excellent law while 31.5% of the respondents said it is a good law. This means that the respondents are satisfied with the enactment of the law, 90.3% of the respondents said they usually participate in the political affairs of the nation. This means the 'Not too Young to Run' campaign is not a surprise to them. Although when asked on how they participate in the political affairs of the nation, 61.3% of the respondents said they cast votes during election while 38.5% said they voice their opinion on public issues. However, 74.8% of the respondents were not sure if the law would increase youths' participation in politics. Majority of the respondents acknowledged that aside from age limit, funding and violence are other factors discouraging some youths in participating in politics.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the analysis of the data collected, it can be concluded that the youths are well aware of the 'Not too Young to Run' Campaign and they feel the 'Not too Young to Run' Law will go a long way to encourage Nigerian youths to participate in politics. Although, majority of the respondents said aside from age limit, finance is a major challenge to youths' participation in politics.

This study therefore recommends the following: The youths should be encouraged by giving them slots of political posts by political parties. Youths occupying political offices should try to make good use of their offices to serve humanity. Political campaigns should be regulated so as to reduce fund involved in campaigns during elections.

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