

Youth Political Participation, Good Governance and Social Inclusion in Nigeria

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Abstract

As the Nigerian population continues to increase, so does the number of youth. The population of youth (18–35 years) in Nigeria is 52.2 million (i.e., about 28% of the total population), which is more than the entire population of Ghana, London and Benin Republic put together. In spite of the prospects that this number holds, young people in Nigeria are largely marginalised from governance, leaving them helpless about their continued exclusion. This is evidenced in the low percentage of youth who hold political and leadership positions in the country. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between youth political participation, good governance and social inclusion in Nigeria. Using a quantitative approach, 1,208 youth aged 18–35 selected from Nairaland participated in the study. Data gathered was analysed using the Spearman correlation coefficient and the result indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between youth political participation and good governance in Nigeria ($r_s(1206) = .615, p < .001$), and that there is a significant positive association between youth political participation and social inclusion in Nigeria ($r_s(1206) = .875, p < .001$). It was recommended that government should create Leadership and Democratic Institutes [LDI] across the states of the federation and establish an Online Leadership Orientation Agency [OLOA] to utilise various social networking sites to provide free leadership courses, webinars, and orientation on the art of governance and the promotion of social inclusion among the youth.

Keywords: good governance; social inclusion; political participation; youth

Introduction

The world today has the largest number of young people in history, with half of the world population under the age of 30. It is interesting to note that 90% of these young people, running into billions, are in the developing world. This underscores the significance of engaging youth for personal and societal development in response to global pressing challenges (UNESCO 2013). As the Nigerian population continues to increase, so does the number of youth, in what has been described as the youth bulge. The upsurge in the youth population—although a strain to the education system and labour market—also has economic value provided that these youth are meaningfully engaged. As such, it behoves any government to take advantage of the teeming population of youth to create a demographic dividend, a declining dependency ratio, and to harness such dividend for increased productivity and a burgeoning labour force. To be specific, the population of youth (18–35 years) in Nigeria is 52.2 million (i.e., circa 28% of the total population), with a 52.8:48.2 female to male ratio (NBS 2018).

Although having a growing youth population may translate into a large and active workforce, it may also result in disaster such as an upsurge in the crime rate, an increased dependency ratio and, worryingly, widespread poverty. This makes it all the more important for the government to actively engage the youth to create an integrated and inclusive society (NBS 2018). As Zohdy (2017) argues, social inclusion of youth in governance is instrumental in avoiding societal costs that come with the exclusion of youth, such as lower voter turnout rates, loss in several percentages of gross domestic product (GDP), violence, extremism, crime, and instability. Most youth efforts, rather than treating youth as partners or agents of governance, regard them as mere recipients of the dividends of governance.

Contrarily, Galstyan (2019) opines that young people are not interested in politics, because politics do not represent the problems that are important to them. In the same vein, Offiong (2018) argues that Nigerian youths' effort at leadership is a futile exercise because generally they are too divided along ethnic lines to clamour for national integration. The youth lack the financial capacity to contest and would prefer to remain politicians' lackeys and let advanced democracies continue to elect the older generation as its leader. Well, Offiong's submission is wrong. For one, Offiong assumes that political participation is restricted to contesting in an election of voting in a government. He also failed to acknowledge that the President of France, Emmanuel Macron (who became president at the age of 39 years) does not belong to the older generation as he presumed. Thinking different from Offiong, Badmus (2018) avers that Nigerian youth are ready to be actively involved in politics, especially as the world is beginning to beam their light on youth activities in Nigeria, while Olufowobi (2018) opines that all that is needed to improve youth participation in politics is an enabling environment.

Research also suggests that the new millennium has witnessed a withdrawal of citizens from democratic participation across a range of democracies. The political engagement of young people has been generally lower in comparison with the general population

(Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths 2019). O'Toole (2015) disagrees with this stance, arguing that in spite of youths' seeming lack of interest in formal political activities, they are attracted to, and often engage in, informal and alternative modes and styles of participation in political life. Zohdy (2017), however, maintains that engaging youth as leaders of development is by far the least utilised and most untapped approach in democratic countries.

The Department for International Development (DFID 2010) submits that there is a major gap in impact between where youth have been offered services as beneficiaries and when they have been politically engaged as true leaders and drivers of their own development and that of their community. The latter has consistently resulted in the greatest impact. As the National Youth Policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2019) would have us believe, Nigerian youth are faced with a myriad of challenges including poverty, multidimensional discrimination, unemployment, barriers to education, and limited opportunities that constitute a bane to their political participation and inclusion, thus leading to a lower percentage of youth who hold political and leadership positions. Moreover, most of the present political leaders became exposed to politics as youth. It is evident from the foregoing that young people in Nigeria are largely marginalised from governance and most of them feel helpless about their continued exclusion. It thus becomes important to assess the youths' role in governance and social inclusion. It is against this backdrop that this study assesses youth political participation, good governance and social inclusion in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Youth Political Participation

Youth political participation is a concept made up of two distinct terms: youth and political participation, which require explaining if the concept is to be meaningful. The notion of youth has been defined in a number of ways in the literature. For instance, while the United Nations defined youth as anyone between the age brackets of 15–24, the World Bank defined youth as individuals aged 12–24. Galstyan (2019, 3) maintains that youth is a period of “transition from dependency to independence,” while Hilker and Fraser (2009) maintain that youth is a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, rather than a rigid construct based on age. Meanwhile, due to the political, sociocultural and economic realities in Africa, these age brackets have been described as too narrow. As a result, Nigeria's 2009 National Youth Policy defined youth as persons between the age of 18 to 35 years (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2019; Galstyan 2019, 3; Hilker and Fraser 2009; UNDP and UNDESA 2013). Therefore, youth as used in this study refers to persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years. The terms youth and young people are used interchangeably.

Political participation is yet another contentious concept in the literature. According to Verba and Nie (1972, 2), political participation refers to “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental

personnel and/or the actions they take.” Van Deth (2014, 5) describes the concept using a range of features: it is an activity; it is voluntary and not ordered by a ruling class or required by law; it refers to people in their role as non-professionals or amateurs, and it concerns government, politics, or the state. According to Sida (2010), youth political participation is the involvement of young people in political activities, civic life, active citizenship, and policymaking. This could take several forms, including serving on a local government council, voting in an election, or participating in the budget process of their local government.

As Ibezim (2019) notes, youth participation in politics in Nigeria is bedevilled by a myriad of challenges, chief among which is a lack of understanding of the benefits that youth political participation holds. The author goes further to state that unemployment, social exclusion, limited capacity, resources and tools are other problems facing the youth. According to Lührmann (2013), as the 2011/2012 Arab states’ popular uprisings have shown, the inclusion of youth in formal politics is essential. In countries in transition (i.e., Nigeria), novel ideas and innovative leadership can help to overcome dictatorial practices. It is also important to pay attention to individual capacity development. While doing so, the capacities of organisations and the degree to which an environment enables individuals and institutions to participate in political processes should be given utmost consideration. This argument is corroborated by Mengistu (2017) who asserts that due to abysmal youth political participation in Africa, and by extension Nigeria, the majority of young people are vulnerable to enlistment for violence against government. The complicity of young people in the establishment of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone is a case in point.

Youth political participation involves more than just voting in an election. As Farthing (2012) argues, youth political participation could take any of the following forms:

- a. Participation as a rights-based practice;
- b. Participation as a mechanism of empowerment of young people;
- c. Participation as a guarantee of efficiency in policy, practice and services; and
- d. Participation as an instrument of young people’s development.

Beyond the conventional forms of political participation—voting, campaign, membership, voluntary work, civic responsibility, demonstrations, and community participation (Galstyan 2019)—new forms of participation have been documented in the literature (Pleyers and Karbach 2014), and they include the following:

- a. Hacking and distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks: This is a form of protest aimed at shutting down online servers and restricting access to internet services;
- b. Clicktivism and slacktivism: This is an invitation to click specific links to express agreement with a particular statement. It could sometimes be voluntary;

- c. Online campaigning: Social networks are increasingly becoming popular for their use in starting a cause and gaining a followership;
- d. Crowdsourcing and crowdfunding: This rests on the use of the “crowd” as a feedback mechanism for ideas, feedback, project design, and financial support;
- e. Liquid democracy/LiquidFeedback: As a new system, it allows users to make a collective decision by granting each individual the chance of voting and “democratically” choosing their representative;
- f. BarCamp: This is an online conference system where the participants themselves design the programme and its sessions (Pleyers and Karbach 2014).

The above provide evidence that the concept of youth political participation is evolving with time and is therefore worthy of continued research and policymaking.

Good Governance

To define good governance, it is important to have a grasp of the term governance. Udeh (2017, 149) submits that governance “involves the dynamics of transforming societal needs into concrete programmes ... [G]overnance means the development of governing styles in which boundaries between public and private sectors have become blurred and the needs of society increasingly met.” According to Adegbami and Adepoju (2017), governance refers to acquiring political power so as to direct a state’s economic power towards development. It is concerned with utilising a state’s resources for the development of that state. The reality in Nigeria, however, indicates otherwise. Hence the concept “good governance” involves public officers managing public resources judiciously and in a “good” way. To the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2002), good governance involves maintaining transparency, accountability, probity and upholding the rule of law in the exercise of power. Udeh (2017) adds that good governance connotes an array of activities such as improved service delivery, citizens’ participation in decision-making, democracy, rule of law, independence of the judiciary, electoral integrity, freedom of the press, equality before the law and inclusion of marginalised groups in the political process. Udok further argues that good governance also guarantees gender equality as well as accountable and transparent governance.

Social Inclusion

The term inclusion may be used to refer specifically to the integration of traditionally marginalised, under-represented and/or at-risk subgroups into broader populations (Zohdy 2017). According to the United Nations (UN 2016, 20), social inclusion is defined as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.” Social inclusion is enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 Agenda and involves, among other things, improving

access to economic resources. As the World Bank (2013, 3–4) notes, social inclusion is “the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society” and “the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society.”

In the opinion of Ozer (2011), social inclusion involves making sure that individuals participate in social life without delimiting factors such as lack of education and poverty. To Edwards (2008, 17), “social exclusion and youth participation are considered to be two opposing concepts, and it is emphasized that social inclusion policies cannot be successful unless they ensure youth participation.”

Youth Political Participation, Good Governance and Social Inclusion

Research suggests that even though there is a decline in youth participation in formal politics, young people are increasingly self-organising informal movements and activities. Many young people are organising fluid social movements across borders and around issues of common concern. Thus, the political leaders should recognise and adapt to this shift in order to better support powerful, organic, youth-led efforts for social change and good governance (Dougherty et al. 2016). As Zohdy (2017) notes, youth participation should involve working with them in governance, as well as the people around them to bridge the gap of eroding trust. Giving the youth a voice in governance and decision-making will help them fulfil their individual potential, avoid negative behaviours, contribute to the well-being of the society, and create institutional capacity. Zohdy further argues that youth participation is more effective when treated as a means to an end. This is better understood in the author’s (Zohdy 2017, 9) words:

The most effective citizen participation efforts tend to be those that design participation not as an end in and of itself. A broader base of both citizens and government officials are more likely to participate and see value in such efforts if they are targeted toward solving specific, concrete, and tangible lived problems (for example, poor quality basic services like education, health, sanitation and transportation). This principle can/should also be applied to inform youth political participation efforts. Young people and their adult counterparts will generally be more likely to participate and to see value in their participation if it is structured around meaningful opportunities to change material conditions, decisions/policies, or other concrete outcomes, than general participation efforts not linked directly to solving actual problems in people’s lives.

To be sure, young people have proved to be productive in contributing to a better world as evidenced in their commitment to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in addition to tackling some of the greatest challenges their generation is facing, such as inequality and climate change. Youth-led efforts tend to be energetic and creative, and often lead to promising outcomes. Youth political participation should be targeted at comprehensive inclusion (political, economic and social inclusion). It is not enough to educate or employ youth to prevent them from engaging in nefarious activities. Rather, many of the rare young people who do engage in political violence

do so because of experiences of injustice (feelings of political exclusion), not necessarily because they are less educated or unemployed. So, any programmes seeking to prevent youth participation in violence must seriously consider how to promote their political, economic and social inclusion (Zohdy 2017). By and large, young people must be regarded as contributory participants in democratic processes and practices. Youth participation in developmental processes, including politics and governance, is a fundamental democratic right. It is also essential to note that youth political participation transcends voting but involves several politically related activities undertaken by youth both online and offline.

Political participation is about having the wherewithal and opportunity needed to influence decision-making as well as engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society. There is sufficient evidence from around the world to illustrate that young people have asserted their role, influence and importance in governance by championing political causes and making giant strides. Young people are leaving their footprints in the sands of time by revolutionising the status quo and promoting governance structures that seek deepened democratic precepts (Dougherty et al. 2016). Dougherty et al.'s (2016) assertion provides an insight into the potential that the Nigerian youth hold, especially for governance, democratic consolidation and inclusion.

In promoting social inclusion, youth are useful in acting as active researchers who could help identify their community needs while also building their capacities with guidance from adult mentors and leaders towards addressing these needs. This should begin with identifying existing youth leaders and nurturing new youth leaders by promoting supportive networks of parents, teachers, and others who help build youth capacity and agency to lead. As Lührmann (2013, 1) notes, it was Kofi Anan who said:

No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.

Placing the above quotation in context, good citizenship and participatory democracy are not accidental attributes; neither are acquired as givens. Rather, they are consciously developed over time. That is, the notion that Nigerian youth are not ready for leadership given their inexperience, ignorance, pride, and immaturity (Offiong 2018) holds no water, and in the least is inconsequential.

Objectives of the Study

Considering the significance of good governance and social inclusion to Nigerian politics, it is imperative to underscore the role of the youth in the balance. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine youth political participation and good governance in Nigeria, and youth political participation and social inclusion in Nigeria.

Methods

To examine the hypotheses, quantitative data was gathered for this study. The study adopted an online survey design in its data gathering process from a convenience sampling of youth. This method was embraced because: 1) web questionnaires are less expensive to administer, can accommodate a large group, and give access to real-time information (Akinyetun 2016), and 2) the prevalent Coronavirus pandemic (as at the time of carrying out this study) made it difficult to utilise a pencil-and-paper survey or engage in the physical administration of an instrument. The study was conducted through Nairaland. Nairaland is an online discussion forum created by Seun Osewa in 2005 with the aim of being the largest online community for Nigerians.

Nairaland has a visitation membership of 32% of the entire population (i.e., 64 million people), and an average of 12,000 daily visits. Nairaland is ranked the second most visited indigenous website in Nigeria (after bet9ja.com) and was ranked 790th in global internet traffic and engagement in April 2020 (Alexa 2020; Gospel 2020; Nairaland n.d.). It is in light of youths' level of engagement and usage of Nairaland that the forum was selected as a platform to disseminate the research instrument. To do this, the author created an online questionnaire using Google Forms and shared the link on the site. The study also adopted a snowball sampling technique to ensure that participants involved several other participants in the study. Based on our categorisation of youth as belonging to the age group of 18–35, the entries from respondents above 35 years of age were treated as invalid. As a result, a total of 1208 participants partook in the study.

Participants

The sample ($n=1208$) comprised more male (62.9%) than female participants, and the majority (58.3) were between 18 and 26 years old. An overwhelming majority (74%) reportedly have a post-secondary school education while slightly more than half of the participants (55.2%) are unemployed. A summary of the sociodemographic variables is presented in Table 1.

Materials

A questionnaire entitled “Youth Political Participation, Good Governance and Social Inclusion Questionnaire” (YPPGGSIQ) was used for this study and contains three parts. Part 1 comprises items assessing participants' sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age group, education level and employment status. Part 2 contains a set of questions aimed at testing youth political participation with a 5-point reverse-coded response scale (1=absolutely untrue, 2=untrue, 3=prefer not to say, 4=true, 5=absolutely true), while Part 3 contains questions to test for good governance and social inclusion with a 5-point reverse-coded response scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). Choosing a 5-point response scale has several merits. It makes the instrument less confusing and more reliable, lowers respondent frustration levels, and allows respondents to express their views quickly (Abdelrahim 2019).

Reliability

Reliability in the instrument designed for the present study was tested for internal consistency (i.e., Cronbach's coefficient alpha). Cronbach's alpha (α) tests showed youth political participation ($\alpha=0.776$), good governance ($\alpha=.747$), and social inclusion ($\alpha=.783$). Since the acceptable reliability coefficient is .70 or higher, the various items of the instrument were considered reliable.

Statistical Analyses

The statistical analyses that comprise (1) inferential descriptive statistics for sociodemographic data (Table 2) and (2) nonparametric data analyses (i.e., the Spearman correlation coefficient; Tables 2 and 3) were carried out with IBM SPSS v.22, and adopted a significance level of $p<0.05$

Results and Discussion

This section outlines the results of the study. The results from the Spearman correlation, summarised in Table 2, indicate that there was a significant positive relationship between youth political participation and good governance in Nigeria ($r_s(1206) = .615, p < .001$). Meanwhile, concerning youth political participation and social inclusion, the Spearman correlation, summarised in Table 3, shows that there was a significant positive association between youth political participation and social inclusion in Nigeria ($r_s(1206) = .875, p < .001$).

Table 1: Sociodemographic variables of participants

Characteristic	Frequency	Per cent
Gender		
Male	760	62.9
Female	448	37.1
Age group		
18–26 years	704	58.3
27–35 years	504	41.7
Education level		
Primary	36	3
Secondary	278	23
Employment status		
Post-secondary	894	74
Employed	541	44.8
Unemployed	667	55.2

Source: Survey 2020

Table 2: Correlations between youth political participation and good governance

			Youth political participation	Good governance
Spearman's rho	Youth political participation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.615*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	1208	1208
	Good Governance	Correlation Coefficient	.615*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	1208	1208

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: Correlations between youth political participation and social inclusion

			Youth political participation	Social inclusion
Spearman's rho	Youth political participation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.875*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	1208	1208
	Social inclusion	Correlation Coefficient	.875*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	1208	1208

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results support the hypothesis that there is a relationship between youth political participation and good governance in Nigeria. To ensure that good governance is engendered, it is imperative to improve youths' involvement and participation in politics. It is believed that doing this will improve transparency and accountability in the system, promote economic and political development, curb corruption and provide the impetus to combat multidimensional poverty in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study presented in this article supports the argument that youth political participation will lead to social inclusion in Nigeria. The indices of social exclusion such as deprivation, marginalisation, and gender inequality can be adequately combated by the youth. With increased youth involvement, human capital will be enhanced and a better life will be assured, which will in turn promote an inclusive society. The findings of this study are consistent with the views of several other authors. According to Tekindal (2017), youth political participation can positively impact a society and even an organisation. Checkoway and Schuster (2003) conclude that youth political participation will empower youth with the knowledge to maximise their political rights, help them democratise, and allow integrated inclusion. Arches and Fleming (2006) also opine that political participation will grant youth the skills to become active citizens and contribute meaningfully to governance and development. Of course, when socially included, youth have the potential to bring about entrepreneurship, innovation, and advancement, which

is particularly needed in the agricultural sector—an area that has been neglected by the youth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that youth political participation has a positive correlation with good governance and social inclusion in Nigeria. The study reveals that the majority of Nigerian youth are unemployed even though a large percentage of them have either attained or are presently undertaking post-secondary education. It is therefore important that attention be paid to youth involvement in politics, because as this study indicates, their involvement will promote good governance, especially in the areas of transparency, accountability, and development. In a like manner, their involvement in politics will effectively address inequity and exclusion to create an inclusive society.

In view of these findings, the study recommends that the Nigerian government should reaffirm her commitment to the “Not too young to run” legislation. In more explicit terms, government should create Leadership and Democratic Institutes (LDIs) across the states of the federation to train youth in the art of governance and prepare them for leadership. When youth perceive that their opinions count and that government takes an interest in their political future, they will be spurred to participate actively in politics.

More so, government under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sport should take advantage of the technological prowess of the youth by creating an Online Leadership Orientation Agency (OLOA) using various social networking sites to provide free leadership courses, webinars, and orientation on the art of governance and promotion of social inclusion among youth. Doing this will increase their interest in government, rekindle their trust in the process, and of course, increase their participation in political activities.

In addition, the curriculum of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions should be revised to reflect compulsory Political, Governance and Leadership education (PGL) courses and political leadership courses should be given equal treatment as core subjects such as Mathematics and English. This is because with adequate knowledge of the political process, governance and politics, youth will be encouraged to participate more in politics as they grow.

Youth are also advised to engage amongst themselves more on social media so as to engender capacity building and a new world order of political participation in Nigerian politics.

Finally, government should make frantic efforts to entrench social inclusion in the country by combating poverty, inequality, deprivation and marginalisation. Government should do this by investing more in human capital development of the youth.

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