

**POLITICAL LEADERSHIP MARGINALIZATION IN NIGERIA:
A CONSIDERATION OF THE YOUTH IN THE
FOURTH REPUBLIC (1999 - 2022)**

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Abstract

Political leadership marginalization is a topical issue in Nigerian politics. The youths in Nigeria who are constituents of the society are not effectively integrated into political leadership opportunities at all levels of governance and desire for inclusion. The quest for political leadership participation has always occupied the political discourses of the youth but the spate for inclusiveness intensified in the Fourth Republic to the extent that the "Not too Young to Run" bill of 2018, signed into law by President Mohammadu Buhari, provides for the youths to vie for any elective position in the country became obviously evident. This free rein came at a very critical period of Nigeria's history characterized by tumultuous challenges such as COVID 19 pandemic, high in security, immense poverty, large scale corruption, hunger, high inflation rate and general alarming economic quagmire. This paper attempts to examine Nigeria's political leadership experiences leading to youth marginalization. The method of data collection and analysis were based on qualitative descriptive approach while the conflict theory was adopted in explaining the problem investigated. The study found out that the youths who are an integral segment of the Nigerian society are actually marginalized in holding political leadership positions in the country. It is, therefore, imperative to make politics a level-playing activity to allow them participate and attain political leadership positions.

Keywords: Political Leadership, Marginalization, Youth, Inclusiveness, Fourth Republic.

Introduction

The youth is among the plethora of groups in Nigeria that are agitated due to political leadership marginalization. Apart from the youth, among the women, and the minority ethnic tribes who constitute no less than fifty percent population of over 240 ethnic groups in Nigeria, even among the three majority tribes of Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo, there is increasing agitation over marginalization of political leadership. This has given rise to the question of which group is actually marginalizing the other groups?

The youth constitute over 60 percent of Nigeria's population. Addressing the problems confronting this critical segment of the Nigerian population is very significant considering the fact that the youth are the engine of development as the working group of any society. The youth are the hope and prospects of political leadership in the society, and should occupy the centre stage of any strategic development plan of any economy. In Nigeria, most leaders are between the age of 60 and 80 years of age. The youths are usually kept at bay by imposing tight rein conditions on them until they attain such ages before leadership is open for them. This deprivation or discrimination is usually backed by the age long narrative that youths are the leaders of tomorrow. The current agitation of the youth is an indication that the status quo be changed. They want to be involved in the political leadership today by integrating them in the leadership recruitment processes through periodic elections, appointments and inclusion in major decisions affecting the country's development.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is pertinent to clarify the concepts used in this project to dispel the possibility of ambiguity in their contextual import. The key concepts are hereby clarified. First is, political leadership Marginalization. This is a form of deprivation or exclusion of an individual or groups from attaining leadership positions or roles in organizations or society. Marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life (Young, 1990:53). This exemption or expulsion is not limited to only the social life of the victims, the political and economic well-being of those affected are usually marginalized. Political leadership participation entails participation in national discourse for the development of a nation at all levels of governance. This can be achieved more effectively when groups are ably represented and are allowed to participate at various levels of political discourses especially policy making processes among

others. Where an individual or group is edged out of this process, it is tantamount to abuse of human dignity and it objects human rights, especially the right to live effectively as equal citizens (Cornish, 2007). Political leadership marginalization portrays an atmosphere of paucity of all-inclusive development which most societies are saddled with like Nigeria.

The Youth: "Youth" is a concept that is contentions in terms of definition. The controversy surrounding the concept is underpinned by its variegated dimensional character. Sociologically, for instance, being youth implies social maturity and competence regulated by the values and expectation of the society. Youth is also measured by demographic implications. Based on this, most nations seek to understand the youth profile of their total population. This demographic significance avails the policy makers the opportunity to invest resources in sectors like health, education, etc of the young population. The term youth and young are often times used interchangeably. In Nigeria the National Youth Policy defined youth as persons of age 18 to 35 years (Hilker and Fraser, 2009, Galstyan, 2019, National Youth Policy, 2019). The youth constitute over 50 million of the Nigerian population (NPC, 2006). The population of the youth in Nigeria thus, places them on vantage position for political leadership of the country.

Theoretical Underpinning

An interest in leadership interrogation as an intellectual affair led to the emergence of many theoretical constructs aimed at explaining the phenomenon of leadership which characterized the early part of the twentieth century. The focus of early leadership theories was on the kind of qualities that distinguished leaders from followers, while subsequent theories looked at other variables such as situational factors and skill level. In this study however, the theory adopted to serve as a guide for analysis is the Conflict Theory which is a sociopolitical theory that originated with Karl Marx (1818-1883) which views society as being a struggle for power among individuals and various social groups. To Karl Marx, two classes exist in the society, the bourgeoisie which is the ruling or higher class and the proletariat which is the oppressed or lower class. According to him, there is always a struggle between the two classes with the higher class always having the tendency to perpetually subject the lower class to indefinite suppression. The lower class struggles to graduate to the higher class. The theory, therefore, sees society as an arena for the struggle over scarce resources based on the assumption that, the valued resources in society are limited such as power and authority, wealth and prestige to mention

but a few. In view of their scarcity, people either individually or in groups struggle with one another to attain them. According to Park and Burgess (1921:574), conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity. Conflict takes a variety of forms such as competition, disagreement, even war among others. The conflict approach views change as its main focus and potentially beneficial to development. Change remains a permanent feature in life and every element in a society contributes to its change.

From the standpoint of political leadership marginalization in Nigeria, the Conflict Theory has the potency of underpinning not just the tone of political activity but also defining its operations in the society. Viewed against this backdrop, the Theory helps in explaining the type of political leadership in Nigeria that sets the agenda for the kind of politics that play out and the prospects of an all-inclusive political development that is not discriminatory.

The Youths as Vanguard of Political Transformation in Nigeria

Youth participation in the political change in Nigeria is dated. This goes back to the pre-independence era when youths have been advocating for better policies and programs to aid the development of Nigeria. On the political party plane, for instance, the formation of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934 led by Ernest Ikoli was the first political party with national outlook, was also a step with a major aim to foster political advancement and enhance socioeconomic well-being of Nigerians (Nnoli, 1980, Mohammed and Abba, 2003). This move championed by the youth opened the gate way for the emergence of other political parties such as the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC) 1934 led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, Action Group (AG) 1951 led Obafemi Awolowo, Northern People's Congress (NPC) 1951 led by Ahmadu Bello, National Element Progressive Union (NEPU) 1951 led by Aminu Kano. Prior to the emergence of the political parties mentioned above, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded in 1923 and led by Herbert Macaulay had existed. Some of those groups of young political activists that led the political parties were the nationalists that later fought and won independence for Nigeria in 1960, which ushered in Nigeria's First Republic. At the early stage of Nigeria's post-independence era, the youth played significant roles in national development. This was due to the fact that it was the youth who took over the government from the colonialists. This period was remarkable characteristic of ground breaking development projects undertaken and relative stability (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016).

The fate of the youth in the leadership space in Nigerian political participation began to witness a down turn in the Second Republic (1979-1984). The Second Republic was led by some political dramatis personae that featured in the First Republic as youths but could no longer be regarded as youths in the new republic. The Nigerian youth do not operate in a vacuum. It has channels of operations such as the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN). This body was founded in 1964 (Kenyas 247). It is a major stakeholder in the implementation of the National Youth Policy. It is also responsible for issues affecting Nigeria's youth as its mouth piece. The aims and objectives of the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) include:

- i. To deep-root the culture of nation and leadership building in our youths.
- ii. To increase the participation of the young people in the society as well as in the decision-making process.
- iii. Positively influence policy issues affecting youth, by being a recognized partner internationally.
- iv. Promote cross breed of ideas and experiences, mutual understanding as well as equal rights and opportunities among youths in Nigeria.
- v. Mobilize, organize and groom young people to be patriotic citizens and help put them back on track with focus on what they can give back to the society.
- vi. To ensure youth are trained as future leaders (Pulse Nigeria, 2016). The creation of NYCN was clearly an expression of feelings of marginalization of the youth in Nigeria and the aims and objectives represent the approaches to resolving the canker.

In its youth strategic initiative, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2019:52) avers to, "encourage and develop the leadership potential of the youth through the establishment of functional leadership and development centres in all local government areas". Relative to this, in one of its multi-sectoral responses to providing political security in the country. The FRN (2019:45) submits with determination to, "Engage sectional and factional groups in constructive dialogue to address agitations". These initiatives are usually intellectually couched and sound but deficit in implementation and follow ups. The hope of the youth has been on the brink of hopelessness.

The Tight Rein of Youth Political Leadership in Nigeria

The period in Nigeria's history effective from 1999 to the present marked a return to democracy popularly known as Nigeria's Fourth Republic after a long period of military leadership. Nigeria's Fourth democratic expedition has not been youth friendly either, just like the previous experiences. Rather than integrate the youth in the scheme of things reckoning with the fact that they have been instrumental to the political changes of the country, the policies and strategies of the leadership have been for the maintenance of the status quo where aged politicians and retired military dictators hijack the political space in the country. They perpetuate themselves in power adopting the sit tight syndrome. This behavior is very typical of African leaders who have no retirement age in politics. For example is, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and others. (Ibezim, 2019). Like other professions have retirement age, politicians too, many political and social analysts argue, should have age limit of all political seats.

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, prior to signing into law, the "Not too Young to Run Bill", held that, the qualifying age of those seeking elective positions was not youth friendly. The youth had to campaign for reduction in age qualification for political positions. From President it was reduced from 40 years to 30 years; Governorship, 35 years to 30 years; senate 35 to 30, House of Representative, 30 to 25 and State House of Assembly 30 to 25 (YIAGA). Prior to the Bill, age barrier had been one of the limiting factors for the youth in ascending to positions of authority in the leadership of this country.

Monetization of Politics and High Rate of Nomination and Interest forms for Political Contest

To further limit the chances of the youth in political contest, political parties tag exorbitant rates for forms. Due to the high rate of poverty among the youths, this is usually unaffordable for them and this leads to frustration. Some of them resort to thuggery serving the interest of the old ruling elites who cash on the weakness of the youth, who due to poverty could not fund their campaigns, to perpetuate themselves in leadership positions. Some youth who indulge in violence do so because of experiences of injustice derived from poverty and political exclusion not necessarily because they are incompetent for leadership.

Youth education and political leadership are co-related. In modern political leadership, certain levels of formal educational qualification form the requisite criteria and overtures to acquisition of political leadership in Nigeria. For instance, the part VI in the procedure for elections to Area Council 106 (I) (d), a person shall be qualified for election under this part of this Act if he is educated up to, at least, the School Certificate level or its equivalent. (INEC, 2010). Other positions such as State House of Assembly, Governorship, National Assembly and President, candidates are required to obtain at least a minimum of diploma certificate to vie for them.

Today, it appears the potency of education has been undervalued. The education subsector of the economy is undermined so much that it has backslid to the brink of decay. Constant and protracted strikes by ASUU, NASU, SSANU, ASUP among other bodies due to poor conditions of service of staff of tertiary institutions, infrastructural decay, poor funding among other deficits attest to the present quagmire in the education industry in Nigeria. University campuses in Nigeria have been completely shut down, deserted and overgrown with bushes sequel to the strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which lasted for eight months between 14th February, 2022 to 14th October, 2022 over non-implementation of ASUU – FGN agreement of 2009 after several years of reminders and warning strikes by ASUU on the issue. The Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) followed suit in March 2022. Students were forced to vacate their schools and subjected to idle minds in their homes. It is clear evident that the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari is lukewarm to the abnormalities in the tertiary education sector. To worsen the situation, with the present debacle, the Buhari led government has instituted a suicidal policy of “no work no pay” against the striking university workers in Nigeria. This nonchalant attitude of the government negatively affects and frustrates youth educational attainment thus inhibits the youth prospects of political leadership in the country. Besides, it contradicts Nigeria’s philosophy to, “live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice” (FRN, 2012:7). Education is a tool for individual, national and societal development. It fosters the general development of the society through such qualities as freedom, equality and justice. The shortfall of these critical values facilitates the intrusion of marginalization in the Nigerian society.

The “Not Too Young to Run” bill is a good step forward for the youth but it is perilous. This is a period of general economic recession plaguing the nation with untold challenges such as COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity, poverty, corruption among others. It is increasingly difficult for the youth to manage a plundered economy. Moreover, the well-being of most of the youth is paltry. The result is potentially bleak, when a miserable dog on watch is let loose to confront the enemy. We are however not pessimistic about the ability of the youth to turn every rubbish to gold like Midas.

Recommendations

We have established that the youth in Nigeria have been marginalized from attaining political leadership positions. This political exclusion is supported by the constitutional provisions using age among other things as a barrier. The youth is not also financially equipped to fund its political ambition. In the light of these and more, we suggest that there should be drastic reduction in the cost of nomination/interest forms and election financing status of the youth. The age adjustment is favourable to the youth qualifying them for contests for elective positions as contained in the “Not Too Young to Run Bill”, which is primarily aimed at relaxing some of the stringent and exclusive provisions of the Nigerian Constitution that prevent the youth from active participation in politics.

There should be provision for independent candidature at elections. This will enable the young contestants to vie for positions using the regular party platforms which are usually tedious and cost intensive. This can be achieved through a formal and legal reform of passage of a bill by the legislative arm of government.

The politics of godfatherism should be discouraged in the country. This practice is underpinned by profit maximization on clientelism. It is a situation where the wealthy and influential politicians who have the resources of navigating and manipulating the political process in favour of their candidates who remain surrogate and subservient to their sponsors or godfathers. The godfathers are usually the ones that call the shots in the policy and decision-making processes of the leaders, depriving the interest of the majority. This act is usually the cause of the prevalence of poverty and conflict in the society.

Conclusion

The Study reveals that the youth have been marginalized in political leadership of the country. Given the marginal level of the youth in Nigeria's political leadership, there is urgent need to change the status quo. The youth have been the prime agents of change but are also usually the most negatively affected by it in the socio-political feature of Nigeria. The youth have been constrained by daunting challenges militating against their attainment of leadership positions where there are avenues to exhibit their leadership agility and potentials for overall development of the country. It is high time the barriers inhibiting the active political participation of the youth in the Fourth Republic were eliminated as a facility to their acquisition of political leadership opportunities in the Nigerian society.

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