STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH MOBILIZATION, EMPOWERMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE AND LESSONS FOR NIGERIA

VICTOR E. ITA

Abstract

The paper explores the strategies adopted by some countries in the contemporary period to boost youth mobilization, empowerment, and political participation, and suggests lessons for Nigeria. The paper employs an analytical approach with a touch of comparison, theoretically grounded in the humanistic and human factor theories. The paper observes that most mobilization initiatives embarked upon by military and civilian regimes in various countries, including Nigeria, are deficient in mobilising the youth for a constructive role within the political system. The paper argues that except for lowering the eligibility age to run for political offices, Nigeria is acting contrary to many other countries, which have recently reviewed their empowerment and mobilisation strategies to allow for meaningful utilisation and participation of their youth in political and other national affairs. As a remedy, the paper recommends positive measures such as limiting campaign expenditures, encouraging internal party democracy, reducing the powers of political godfathers, and ensuring credible and peaceful elections in the country.

Keywords: Empowerment, ethical revolution, youth mobilization, political participation, self-liberation.

Introduction

In recent times, youth mobilization and empowerment have gained national and international attention due to persistent agitation for youth participation in national and political issues. As of late, international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

(UNCED), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth (UNWPAY) have ranked youth empowerment as one of their top priorities and concerns. In light of this, numerous nations across the globe have made frantic efforts to mobilise, empower and offer their youth opportunities for participation in certain facets of society to develop self-sufficient lives.

The importance of youth in the development of society has not received the attention it deserves in the majority of developing nations. This has made it more difficult to successfully mobilise, empower and involve them fully in both political and socio-economic life in their societies. For example, 83.5% of Nigeria's population is between the ages of 0 and 39, making it a youth-dominated country. Although these youths play a significant role in society and have perhaps been involved in some form of political activities lately, the Nigerian government is not doing much to inspire and advance their goals. This has led to the misdirection of youthful energies into unconventional political activities such as thuggery, arson, murder and election rigging among other vices.

Given the role of mobilization and empowerment in politics, it is important to examine the place of the youth vis-à-vis political participation. This is particularly true if, as Rosenstone & Hansen (1993) argued mobilization accentuates the bias in political participation towards those with greater individual and political resources. Thus, the paper addresses the following pertinent questions:

(i) How significant is youth empowerment and mobilisation for effective political participation in national affairs?

(ii) What strategies encourage youth mobilisation and political participation in recent times, and what lesson is there for Nigeria?

Considering the aforementioned problem, this paper aims to examine the necessity for youth mobilization and empowerment on the one hand and the strategies that have potently increased youth involvement in the political process with particular implications for Nigeria. The paper is divided into an introduction, conceptual review and theoretical framework, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

This paper grapples with the concepts of the youth, political mobilization, youth empowerment and political participation. Their operationalization is vital to establishing the linkage between them. To start with, a *youth*, according to Gibson (2001), is someone between the ages of 12 and 35 who is going through the process of developing mentally and physically to meet the demands of maturity. Similarly, Akpan (2006), defined youth as the state or time of being young; a period when someone is young, especially between being a child and being fully grown, or a period of life from puberty to the attainment of full-grown adulthood. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (2010), considered youth as those who are aged between 13 to 25 years; whereas Ghana's National Youth Policy (2010) and African Union (2016), perceived the youth as young people who are between the ages of 15 to 35 years. South African National Youth Policy (2014), described youth as young people under the ages of 14 to 35 years. In Nigeria, a youth is one under the ages of 15 to 29 years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2015a), the terms 'young people' and 'youth' are used to refer to young men and women between the ages of 10 and 24 years, while adolescence refers to the age group between 10 and 19 years of age. From the above conceptualisations, it is clear that academics, authors, and even national and international organisations have yet to agree upon the age range that defines the youth.

For Ita & Bassey (2022), youth is the state of being youthful, juvenile, and youthful. It is that aspect of one's existence that succeeds the childhood stage and proceeds to adult age. Beyond biological viewpoints, additional references to the concept of youth typically touch on accepted elements including physical growth, age classifications, behavioural characteristics, and the degree of reliance on parents.

Political Mobilisation: According to Oberschall's (2011), conceptualization, political mobilisation is the processes by which a group transforms from a passive assembly of persons to an active participant in public life. This group may be formed based on caste, class, religion, nationality or ethnicity, gender, or engagement in certain political causes. It involves organising individuals to work together on a project, such as encouraging people to vote for a candidate they like or encouraging them to speak with government authorities about their needs and interests.

In the words of Tarrow (2011), political mobilisation is concerned with how, and the degree to which groups are politically or electorally mobilised in a democratic political system to influence who governs or how they do so. When these groups lose faith in the established democratic apparatus or when there are no opportunities for genuine political participation, they become mobilised for political actions such as protests, strikes, and rebellions. To bolster the government's power, the ruling class also attempts to mobilise the supporters of the regime. Political mobilisation is therefore purposeful and goal-oriented. As one of the fundamental components of a functioning democracy, it has the power to spark democratic change and overthrow authoritarian governments as evident in historical revolutions, national anti-colonial movements, as well as in a number of contemporary social movements (Ita & Bassey, 2017; Ita, 2018).

According to Strandberg (2006), mobilisation is how political candidates, parties, activists, and groups persuade others to get involved in politics to enact legislation, win elections, and have

an impact on public policies. People may be contacted by political organisations and given a particular chance to get involved in politics. Generally speaking, mobilisation is a necessary precondition before any involvement can take place. Corroborating this view, Marc (2010), Bello & Kolawole-Ismail (2017), conceptualized political mobilization as how the citizens are organised to put pressure on the political representatives. For them, the majority of political involvement and participation requires mobilisation as a necessary prerequisite. In actuality, before individuals may participate in any kind of civic or electioneering activity, mobilisation and recruiting processes are necessary prerequisites. In recent years, these mobilization procedures have been transformed rapidly from a direct to an indirect process.

Youth empowerment: The term 'youth empowerment' originates from the root word 'empowerment,' which means to make capable, often by providing strength, courage, material and spiritual support, etc. (Ekong & Essien, 2006). Simply put, empowerment is the provision of all the 'necessaries' required to make someone competent. The World Bank (2014), conceptualizes empowerment as the process of giving people or groups the ability to make decisions and turn those decisions into the actions and results they want; via this process, a person becomes a change agent.

According to Whetton, Cameron & Woods (1996), empowerment is the inclination of people to experience self-importance and self-liberation in which they have control over their affairs. The authors identified five qualities which empowerment is expected to produce. *First,* a feeling of self-efficacy, which gives an individual the conviction that he/she is capable of completing a task successfully; *second,* self-determination, which gives one the conviction that he/she has a choice in starting and stopping actions; *third,* personal control, which suggests the ability to influence a change in the desired direction; *fourth,* appreciating and finding value in the task being completed; and, *finally,* trust, which denotes a sense of assurance regarding just and

equitable treatment by those in positions of authority as well as a sense of security both individually and collectively.

Accordingly, youth empowerment embraces efforts that involve providing particular persons with relevant training, education, essential skills, etc. that will enable them to survive and make the greatest possible contributions to the growth and development of their community (Emejuru, 2017). This comprises three essential steps: education (giving them life skills), indoctrination (giving them a self-sustaining conscience), and teaching them entrepreneurial skills (exposing them to many types of crafts, jobs, and professions). Thus, empowerment involves restructuring the attitude and belief patterns of the youth and equipping them with the ability to make changes in their lives and that of others.

From the preceding analysis, it becomes feasible to determine the relationship between mobilisation and empowerment. The former refers to enabling or authorising one to act or carry out specific tasks, whereas the latter refers to establishing a condition of preparedness for participation in an activity, that is, allocating the society's material and human resources to accomplish certain objectives. For instance, Section 117(2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), empowers the youth to vote in an election. Those who have attained the age of 21 could contest to be councillors in their respective Local Government Areas and so on. Hence, mobilization generates empowerment while empowerment facilitates mobilization.

Political participation: Political participation is the conventional (traditional) and unconventional (unorthodox) engagement by individuals and groups with the governmental processes that affect their lives. Citizens' propensity, aptitude, and desire to actively participate in political activities with the implicit or explicit goal of influencing governmental decisions - decisions that may involve legal, unlawful, or occasionally extra-legal acts - are heavily influenced by political

actions. Amplifying this view, Ita & Edet (2018), espoused that conventional participation pertains to actions deemed suitable by the prevailing political culture, such as voting, pursuing elective office, working for a candidate or political party, composing correspondence with public officials, and so forth. In contrast, unconventional forms of political participation, such as signing petitions, endorsing boycotts, organising protests and demonstrations, and engaging in political violence, are typically not deemed suitable by the prevailing political culture. These include all kinds of political protests which may or may not violate the law.

From the standpoint of Kaase (2011), political participation is a voluntary (non-mandatory) civic activity to influence government action, either directly via influencing the formulation or execution of public policies or indirectly through influencing the choice of the policymakers. Eneji & Ikeorji (2018), struck the same chord when they stated that political participation is those private acts of citizens that aim to support or influence politics and the government. Therefore, for any political system to remain legitimate and stable, political participation is a necessary component.

Theoretical Discourse

The theoretical base of this paper is anchored on the humanistic and the human factor theories as popularized by Adjibolosoo (1995). On the one hand, the humanistic theory holds that heightening or focusing man's ability to appreciate his endowment amounts to arming him with a new tool with which to shape his life and his fortune. It is purely an educational programme concerned with raising the people's consciousness and thus causing their socio-economic empowerment (Ering, 2000; Modo, 2006). Self-emancipation and the ability to exert control over one's surroundings and technical endeavours are only possible through this kind of awareness. A complete and ongoing transformation of attitudes, beliefs, and outlook on life may be accomplished with this approach to human development. From the theory's standpoint, youth can

make meaningful contributions to the advancement of society as long as they possess the appropriate entrepreneurial skills, values, and attitudes.

On the other hand, the human factor theory maintains that if the human factor component is not developed, development initiatives involving individuals of all social classes and organisations in developing nations will be completely pointless. According to Muzvidziwa (1999), the human factor is predicated on the idea that since people create their outcomes when they use their human factor attributes to the fullest, initial development plans, policies, and programmes should be primarily concerned with helping citizens, especially the youth, who make up the majority of the labour force, to develop the necessary human factors traits.

Fundamentally, the human factor encompasses a range of personality traits and additional aspects of human behaviour that facilitate the establishment and maintenance of social, economic, and political institutions. These elements support social welfare, political harmony, a disciplined workforce, a just legal system, respect for human dignity and the sanctity of life, and the operation and implementation of the rule of law, among other things. As is frequently the case, no social, economic, or political organisation can operate efficiently without a network of devoted individuals who support them steadfastly. These people have to fervently support and consistently uphold the ideals of society. Thus, to successfully integrate the youth into the political system, any society must design, develop, and administer programmes that instil in them certain human factor characteristics and values such as honesty, decency, accountability, integrity, diligence, trust, and dedication.

A Survey of Contemporary Strategies for Boosting Youth Mobilization and Participation

In the contemporary era, several declarations and calls for action to enhance the quality of youth participation in politics and the decision-making process have been made by international

actors, and development organizations and adopted by various national governments. At this juncture, it is imperative to discuss these strategies and their potency:

First, is ***youth capacity development***. Some countries explicitly embark on developing youth capacity to boost their involvement in political affairs. This strategy was prioritised with the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security at its 7573rd meeting on December 9, 2015. The resolution acknowledges the significant role of youth in maintaining international peace and security and also highlights the threat posed by the growing radicalization of young people. It emphasizes the importance of youth as essential partners and leaders, rather than perpetrators or victims.

The implementation of UNSCR 2250 involves engaging young people in decision-making and societal transition processes. For instance, in Tunisia, a group of young entrepreneurs ran an event called 'Entrepreneurship Against Terrorism', where they trained young participants in leadership and business development. The winning group developed an App to make it easier for people to report suspicious activities, such as incitement to violence (Petré, 2015). Similarly, in Somalia, the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre provided young people with vocational skills, education, investment, and leadership training to encourage their peers to defect from militant groups (Extremely Together, 2016).

Second, the ***adoption of the international legal framework.*** International instruments provide a foundation for countries to develop legislation and policies to promote youth participation in political and electoral processes. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), both acknowledge the fundamental human right to full participation in a nation's political and electoral processes. Article 25 of the Covenant states that everyone has the right to participate directly in public affairs or through representatives chosen freely and vote in legitimate periodic

elections held by universal and equal suffrage and secret ballot. Also, the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth, signed in 2005, in its Article 21 explicitly enshrines the right of youth to participate in politics, addressing their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights (ACE, 2023).

In the 2010s, the international community emphasized youth participation through resolutions, charters, and action plans, such as the African Youth Charter and the European Union Strategy for Youth. These initiatives accentuate the importance of information and capacity development for young people to become active citizens and leaders (African Union, 2016; European Commission, 2018). The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by 193 United Nations Member States aims to ensure that no one is left behind, emphasizing the need to empower youth in governance. This acknowledges the importance of addressing the needs of youth in various countries.

Third, *formulating a youth-friendly legal framework*. The legal age of majority and/or voting age on the one hand, and the age at which a person can hold elected office on the other, differ in one-third of the nations whose laws specify that a person must be 25 years of age or older to be elected. Specific provisions to encourage youth mobilisation and political participation have frequently been incorporated into national constitutions as a result of traditionally marginalised groups being more involved in their formulation. For example, in all 24 governorates of Tunisia, the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) members, citizens, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) participated in a nationwide dialogue supported by UNDP between 2012 and 2013. As a result, 80 Assembly deputies received training in public consultation procedures and legislative and constitutional drafting. A total of 320 university representatives, 300 CSOs, and almost 6,000 individuals contributed to the discussion. An extensive countrywide survey of 1,100 Tunisian youth, whose marginalisation and exclusion from the political sphere triggered the 2011

revolution, provided the impetus for their assimilation and engagement in the political affairs of the country (United Nations Development Programme, 2015b). In consequence thereof, the 2014 Constitution of Tunisia (as amended) in Article 8 acknowledges in its provision that:

> Youth are an active force in building the nation. The state seeks to provide the necessary conditions for developing the capacities of youth and realizing their potential, supports them to assume responsibility, and strives to extend and generalize their participation in social, economic, cultural and political development.

What is discernible from the above is that constitutions are the highest law within legal systems; they give relevant stakeholders in the electoral process a possible instrument to develop targeted interventions to promote the mobilization and participation of youth in national politics.

Fourth, *setting quotas for youth.* Several nations, including Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Uganda, have implemented quotas to boost youth participation and representation in politics. This follows the realisation that, despite comprising 25% of the global population, youth participation and influence in formal politics remain limited. These quotas take various forms, but most fall into the following categories:

(a) Reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislative): A few countries have reserved seats to promote the inclusion of youth in legislative bodies. These include:

- Kenya, with 12 members nominated by political parties to represent special interest groups (youth, persons with disabilities, and workers) with the relevant list to be composed of alternating male and female candidates.
- Uganda, with five seats for people under 30, one of whom must be a woman.
- Rwanda, with two members of parliament elected by the National Youth Council (Kethusegile-Juru, 2004).

(b) Legal candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislative). Numerous nations have adopted this method, though with varying impacts, depending on the position in which the youth is placed

on political party lists and the type of electoral system used. Hence, in countries with constitutions or laws providing quotas for young candidates, political parties are obligated to fill all their candidate lists with a minimum number of young people. Candidate quotas have proven to be a successful strategy for augmenting youth representation and assigning electable positions.

(c) Voluntary political party quotas: In countries with no legal provisions guaranteeing a minimum of youth on candidate lists or reserved seats for young people, political parties have opted to introduce voluntary quotas to ensure that a minimum of young candidates are represented on their lists. For example, in Cyprus, the Movement for Social Democracy adopted a 20 per cent quota for candidates under 35 years old in 2010; and in Nicaragua, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation specified a fifteen percent quota for youth in party leadership and electoral lists since 2002 (ACE, 2023).

Although youth quotas are a relatively new form of intervention, studies on the adoption of gender quotas provide valuable insights into the long-term viability of political quotas. Kenya, for example, has implemented gender quotas for women, with 47 seats in the national parliament, and 12 seats set aside for special interest groups, such as youth, people with disabilities, and workers, utilising the reserved seat quota system. A male and a female seat in the Senate is set aside for the youth. Sub-national levels are likewise subject to quotas. Kenya has also aligned the eligibility age for candidates with the voting age.

Fifth, *lowering the voting age.* In response to the numerous debates in several countries since 2000 about reducing the voting age to 17 or 16, some countries including the United States, Austria, Germany, and Norway, among others have passed legislation lowering the voting age, in some cases as a pilot in one local district before expanding to others. Among these countries, only Austria has extended its legal framework to include all elections. Additionally, evidence from United States city elections as well as national elections in Denmark and Austria has demonstrated

that 16 and 17-year-olds are enthusiastic political participants and that voting at this age develops voting habits. Implicitly, voters between the ages of 16 and 17 who are raised in a culture of civic engagement may grow up to be older, more politically engaged adults than those who wait until they are 18 or 19 to cast their first ballot (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; ACE, 2023).

According to Mycock & Tonge (2012), many political parties in the United Kingdom (UK) have varying requirements for joining their youth wings. For example, Young Labour and Liberal Youth have a 26-year maximum, whereas the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has a 35-year maximum. Even among parties with similar or even identical ideological affiliations, different standards apply in other nations. For instance, the Young Liberals in Australia accept membership from 16 to 30 years old (Young Liberal, 2012), while some parties in the UK set the lower limit at the age of 18, which is also the legal voting age. The degree to which young people in these nations are involved in politics suggests that they view politics as an effective and civically responsible endeavour. Consequently, youths inherently become active participants in their cultural environments and experiences as they mature within certain situations.

Sixth, is the strategy of *lowering the age eligibility to run for office.* Some national governments have reviewed the minimum age at which young people may run for political offices (Not Too Young To Run, 2018a). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2018, p. 23), youth in the majority of nations have to wait a few years after obtaining the right to vote before they may run for public l office - usually until they attain 21 or 25 years, but in some countries as late as 35 or even 40. In nations with large young populations, these standards have produced a "youth bulge" or significant divides between the youth voters and political leaders. In Zimbabwe for example, 20 per cent of the population is aged between 15 and 24, but are not eligible to run for office until they are 21 years old for the lower house and 40 years old for the upper house.

Nonetheless, a few nations, such as Kenya, France, Austria, and Belgium, on realising age gaps as a barrier to effective youth mobilization and participation have decreased the minimum age requirement to become a candidate and run for office. In 2007, Turkey lowered the eligibility age for parliament from 30 to 25, following the Young MPs Now campaign, a grass-roots initiative that was run by youth organizations and youth councils. In 2017, following a constitutional referendum, Turkey again lowered the eligibility age to 18. The 2018 elections saw the youngest-ever MP candidate, an 18-year-old female high school student. Nigeria joined the bandwagon in 2018 when the national legislators, in response to the advocacy campaign, Not-Too-Young-To-Run initiative launched in Nigeria in May 2016 by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), passed a bill that reduced the eligibility age from 35 to 30 for the Senate and Governorship; and from 30 to 25 for the States Houses of Assemblies and House of Representatives.

Seventh, *youth-friendly political finance legislation.* In most nations, powerful and affluent people and organisations control most aspects of politics. Notwithstanding their strong desire to run for government, young people with comparatively less power or financial backing sometimes have fewer options due to high and frequently rising participation expenses. Acknowledging that political endeavours require substantial financial support, some nations have used government subsidies to promote political pluralism and a level playing field. Ireland and Kenya are two nations that have enacted laws mandating political parties to allocate a portion of their funds towards boosting the representation of youth in politics. In Kenya, according to Article 26.1 of the Political Parties Act 2011, at least 30 per cent of direct public funding is used for 'promoting the representation in Parliament and in the county assemblies of women, persons with disabilities, youth, ethnic and other minorities and marginalized communities'.

On the other side, in Ireland, as per Section 18 of the Electoral Act, 1997 (as amended), funds are provided for eligible parties' expenses related to encouraging young people and women to participate in politics (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2012). In several nations, incumbents benefit from the systematic deployment of state and federal resources during election seasons. This undermines the standing of young people and opposition candidates who are not affiliated with the parties or governments in power.

Youth Mobilization and Participation Experience in Nigeria

In Nigeria, youth activism and political engagement date back to 1936 when the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was established by James Churchill Vaughan, Hezekiah Oladipo Davies, and Kofo Abayomi, among other young people. This, notably, was the first national political party in the country, and its main goals were to promote political development and improve Nigerians' socio-economic well-being. This revolutionary accomplishment led to the emergence of other political parties like the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC) in 1944, the Action Group (AG) and National Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in 1950, and Northern People's Congress (NPC) in 1951 (Umar & Danjuma, 2008; Ita, 2018).

The pre-independence endeavours of Nigerian youth, including those of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, and Anthony Enahoro, were essential to Nigeria's emergence as an independent nation. Their clamour for independence began while they were young students' union leaders, and they undertook bold collective initiatives that opposed the colonial imperial rule. Noteworthily, Anthony Enahoro was about 21 when he moved the motion for Nigeria's independence in 1953 and less than 30 years later when he served as Federal Commissioner of Information; Isaac Boro formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force in his 30s and later fought for his people's emancipation (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016; Afolayan, 2018).

Plausibly, with the attainment of independence, the youth remained at the vanguard of dramatic political upheavals. For example, the first coup d'état in Nigeria was launched by the 29-year-old Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu (1937-1967) on January 15, 1966. As a result, in the early years of the post-independence era, the youth brought about a major shift from democratic to military rule. Again, Yakubu Gowon became Nigeria's Head of State at the age of 29. As a young leader, he stopped the Eastern region's bid at secession during a crucial three-year civil war (1967-1970). This demonstrated the youth's belief in the unity of the nation. Notably, General Murtala Mohammed (1938-1976) and Olusegun Obasanjo were in their youthful age when they assumed leadership positions as Nigeria's Military Heads of State.

Following Nigeria's restoration to civil rule in 1979, there was a decrease in the number of young people participating in politics. Hence, the politicians who participated actively in the First Republic (1960-1966), who could no longer be considered as youths, headed the Second Republic (1979-1984) (Umar & Danjuma, 2008). The government of the day launched mobilisation programmes, but these were not directly related to politics in the end; more so, they were often ad hoc and ill-defined in intent, with the unintended consequences of these initiatives often having greater political significance (Agbaje, 1997). Among these dispirited mobilization programmes are the National Youth Service Corps Scheme (1973 to date), which aims to foster unity among Nigerian youths, and the Ethical Revolution (1981-2000), which is aimed at fighting pervasive corruption and moral decay among Nigerians. There was no specific plan designed to encourage young people to participate meaningfully in the political process.

With the ousting of the Second Republic, the Buhari/Idiagbon military regime introduced the War Against Indiscipline (WAI). However, this too was not directly a programme of political mobilisation. It was designed to check indiscipline in the Nigerian society which was identified by the regime as the principal cause of the failure of the Second Republic. When the military regime

headed by General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) came on board, it paid more than lip service to political mobilization, orientation and education. The regime approached the problem from an institutional perspective by establishing the Nigerian Political Bureau, headed by Dr Samuel Joseph Cookey, with the mandate to search for political consensus and to produce a new political culture for Nigerians. In its report, the Bureau observed that low consciousness had made the people, especially the youth, vulnerable to the manipulations of the power elite in society (MAMSER, 1987).

The backlash from such actions has been the emergence of a culture of apathy to the political process. Hence, the creation of a National Directorate for Social Mobilization was recommended and included as part of the transition programme of Babangida's administration to inculcate new values, politically educate the adults, socialize the young and mobilize the masses for participation in the new political order (Babangida, 1989). Thus, MAMSER (Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery) was created for political mobilization of the masses, including the youth, while the Centre for Democratic Studies was established for political education and induction of political elite into their respective roles and democratic norms.

In modern-day Nigeria, youth mobilisation has assumed a distinct dimension, as political parties and their adherents enlist and retain young people as political goons. This development has altered the political landscape, notably the election contests, which have become increasingly violent and unstable over time, as well as exacerbated the surge of electoral violence, thuggery, and other similar activities (Ita, 2022). Consequently, some youth associations have emerged in various parts of Nigeria, such as the 'Area Boys' in the South-West, the 'Militants' in the South-South, the 'Alaye Boys or Agbero' in the South- West, and the 'Yan Daba' or 'Yan Kalare' or 'Sarasuka' in the North, and primarily used by political elite to perpetuate electoral violence (Umar

and Danjuma, 2008). Pointedly and sadly too, since 1999, the youth have been used to incite violence during political campaigns and elections, which has caused the populace to lose interest in Nigeria's democratic and political agenda (Nweke, 2005; Ita, 2022).

Lesson for Nigeria

Nigeria's current state of national development, like that of any other developing nation in the twenty-first century, demands giving youth political mobilisation, empowerment and participation more careful consideration as there is an increasing drive for power, involvement in national decision-making, and the urge to be heard by youth. Unarguably, denying them the opportunity to engage in political and decision-making processes is capable of generating agitations and worrisome uprisings in the Nigerian polity. This indeed is enough risk to national security and development, including the persistence of violent crimes like kidnaping, and robbery and the growth of secret organisations and associations in some geo-political zones.

Political mobilization and empowerment are two processes needed to change the political system positively as they play a complementary role in the socialization process as both seek to engender changes in values, attitudes and behavioural patterns in the society. These changes manifest in how the citizens, mostly the youth, participate in politics. Since the youth are said to hold the future of society, they need to be mobilized and empowered in the right direction that will ensure stability and sustainable political development.

A cursory review of the strategies covered in the previous section of this paper reveals that Nigeria only adopted the eligibility age reduction strategy through the Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act, which amended sections 65, 106, 131, and 177 of the Nigerian constitution to lower the eligibility age from 40 to 35 for the office of the President, from 35 to 30 for the Senate and Governorship, and from 30 to 25 for the States Houses of Assemblies and House of

Representatives (Krook & Nugent, 2018). The bill was passed by the National Assembly in July 2017 and forwarded to the President for approval in April 2018, who signed it into law on 31 May 2018. The final version reduced the age to run for President, the House of Representatives, and the States Houses of Assemblies but retained the existing age qualifications for Governors and Senators.

As per Not Too Young To Run (2018b, p. 3), the bill's passage was expected to herald 'the beginning of a new era' in Nigerian politics, set the country on a course to demonstrate 'unparalleled belief in youth leadership and inclusive politics', and position the nation as a globally recognised entity that is fully committed to meeting the needs of its youth. Additionally, the bill was expected to promote democratic development, deepen intergenerational dialogue and learning, lessen political violence and instability, and enhance competitive politics in the nation. In contrast, there is no assurance that the bill's passage into law would increase youth representation in Nigeria. Nigerian youth still have to wait longer than many of their peers around the world before they become eligible to run, between the ages of 25 and 35.

Judging from the above, it is clear that to promote genuine youth engagement in Nigerian politics, more substantial measures than merely reducing the age requirement for running for office are required. Political parties, lawmakers, and other interested parties in the Nigerian electoral project need to come up with proactive measures to mandate a certain proportion of young candidates on party ballots, amend the electoral law to restrict campaign spending, encourage internal party democracy, hold democratic primaries free from the influence of godfathers, and guarantee credible and orderly elections.

Conclusion

This paper explored youth mobilisation and empowerment vis-a-vis modern strategies and opportunities for increasing youth participation in the political process. Whether in developed or developing nations, political participation mobilisation techniques should be viewed as a democratic process that involves the populace in decision-making and gives them a positive influence over power through voting and other constitutional measures that support national development.

In all, purposeful mobilization and empowerment of the youths depend on the goals and posture of the political leadership. When the leaders are sincere, the youths will follow sincerely; when the objective of mobilization and empowerment is beneficial to the society, the youths and the entire society will support them. Nigeria and other developing nations have not yet developed a coherent idea for this goal. Again, some mobilization activities that are meant to mobilize and empower the youth, are often done for a wrong reason and wrong intent. In Nigeria, most of the mobilization programmes were and are merely meant to garner public support and legitimacy for the rulers as 'performing' or 'action' rulers.

For future mobilization activities to succeed, such must begin at the level of leadership and flow down to the youths and the rest of society. Therefore, it is incumbent for Nigerian leaders and other developing nations to re-evaluate their strategies for promoting youth mobilisation, empowerment, and political participation while emphasising positive and constructive improvements.

Recommendations

Flowing from the findings in the preceding sections, this paper recommends the implementation of result-oriented strategies in the mobilization and empowerment of youth for effective involvement in political affairs, namely:

✓ The youths should be allowed to run for political offices and be nominated by political parties in increasing numbers. This will incentivize young people to start thinking about getting more involved in politics at a younger age than they may have done if the law is not changed.

✓ It is important to establish appropriate guidelines for donations and campaign expenses so that youth from diverse backgrounds, including women, minorities and indigenous peoples, can finance their political campaigns. Otherwise, power and access will remain concentrated among those from wealthy backgrounds and/or established political families.

✓ Government initiatives aimed at fostering youth patriotism, national awareness, and pride, together with significant growth of youth-related programmes, should be employed to empower the youth. Through nationally directed and disciplined training, this kind of empowerment will represent the 'readiness to bring together qualified young men and women and inculcate in them a sense of discipline, dedication, national pride and consciousness'.

✓ It is vital to discourage the use of young people as political bodyguards and thugs. If the elite played the political game by the rules, the elite would not have any reason to feel threatened or require the protection of thugs.

✓ The introduction of youth quotas in national constitutions and electoral laws using reserved seats as well as the entrenchment of quotas for youth by political parties in their internal regulations and manifestoes to place young candidates in electable positions should be prioritized.

✓ The national governments, including Nigeria, should work with youth organisations at all levels to devise, execute, and oversee policies that address the educational, training, and productive capacity-building requirements of the youth.

References

ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2023). *Youth and elections*. Stockholm: ACE Project.

Adjibolosoo, S. (1995). *The human factors in developing Africa*. Westport: Praeger.

Afolayan, M.S. (2018). ''Youth Political Participation in Nigeria: Legality, Trends, Dilemmas and Opportunities. ''*Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization, 80,* 100-106.

African Union (AU) (2016). *African Youth Charter*. Addis Ababa: African Union.

Agbaje, A.A. (1997). Mobilizing for a new Political Culture. In Diamond, L., Kirk-Greene, A. & Oyediran, O. (Eds.), *Transition without end: Nigerian politics and civil society under Babangida*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Akpan, G.E. (2006). Issues in Empowerment. In Akpan, G.E. & Ekong, C.N. (Eds.), *Youth empowerment for sustainable development*. Uyo: Minder International Publishers.

Amzat, J. & Abdullahi, A.A. (2016).'' Youth and Political Change in Nigeria: Historical Note and Critical Discourse.'' *AFFRIKA: Journal of Politics, Economics and Society, 6*(2), 119-137.

Babangida, I.B (1989). *Portrait of a new Nigeria: Selected speeches of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida*. Lagos: Precision Press.

Bello, S. & Kolawole-Ismail, B. (2017).'' Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria: A Theoretical Perspective''. *Ebonyi State University Journal of Mass Communication 4*(1), 149-164.

Bhatti, Y. & Hansen, K.M. (2012). ''Leaving the Nest and the Social Act of Voting: Turnout among first-time Voters.'' *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 22*(4), 380-406.

Ekong, C.N & Essien, E.B (2006). <u>Empowering the Youth in Sporting Activities</u>. In Akpan, G.E. & Ekong, C.N. (Eds.), *Youth empowerment for sustainable development.* Uyo: Minder International Publishers.

Emejuru, S. (2016). ''The Concept of Youth Empowerment.'' Retrieved from *https://www.edclueswordpress. com/2016/02/03/the-concept-of-youth-empowerment.*

Eneji, A.P. & Ikeorji, C.R. (2018). ''Youth Political Participation and Electoral Violence in the 21st Century Nigeria: Bridging the gap.'' *World Journal of Innovative Research, 4*(6), 9-13.

Ering, S.O. (2000). ''Nigerian Rural Development Policies and Social Engineering: Issues of Theory and Practice.'' *Journal of Agribusiness and Rural Development, 1*(1), 108-121.

European Commission (2018). *An EU strategy for youth-investing and empowering: A Renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities.* Brussels: European Commission.

Extremely Together (2016). Ilwad Elman:'' Including Youth is a Priority.'' *Extremely Together*, 18 May. Retrieved from http://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/blog/ilwad-elman-including-youth-priority/.

Federal Government of Nigeria (2019). *National youth policy*. Abuja: Federal Government Press.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As amended).* Abuja: Government Printers.

Gibson, J. (2001).'' Literacy and Intra-household Externalities.'' *World Development, 29*(1), 155-166.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA) (2012). *Political finance regulations around the world: An overview of the International IDEA database*. Stockholm: IIDEA.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2018). *Youth participation in national parliaments*. Geneva: IPU.

Ita, V.E. (2018). ''Political Parties and Consensus Building for Sustainable Democracy in Contemporary Nigeria.'' *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research, 6*(3), 491-501.

Ita, V.E. & Bassey, J.E. (2022). ''Rising Youth Unemployment and the Socio-economic Realities in Nigeria: The Akwa Ibom State experience.'' *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability, 10*(3), 1-14.

Ita, V.E. & Bassey, M.E. (2017). ''Nigeria's Political Parties and the Development of National Consciousness: Observations and Appraisal.'' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies, 3*(6), 459-475.

Ita, V.E. & Edet, L.I. (2018).'' Patterns of Political Culture and the Paradox of Political Participation in Nigeria: An Analytical Evaluation.'' *Journal of Politics and Democratization, 3*(1), 1-19.

Ita, V.E. (2018). **''**Contending Issues in Party and Electoral Politics and Consequences for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: A Historical and Comparative Analysis''. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2(8), 110-121.

Ita, V.E. (2022).'' Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Democratic Experience: A Survey of South-South Geo-political Zone.'' *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, *10*(2), 16-33.

Kaase, M. (2011). Participation. In Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D. & Morlino, L. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*. California: Sage Publications.

Kethusegile-Juru, B.M. (2004). Quota Systems in Africa: An Overview. In Ballington, J. (Ed.), *The implementation of quotas: African experiences*. Stockholm: IIDEA.

Krook, M.L. and Nugent, M.K. (2018). ''Not too Young to Run? Age Requirements and Young People in Elected Office.'' *Intergenerational Justice Review, 2*, 60-67.

MAMSER (1987). *Report of the political bureau.* Abuja: MAMSER Publications.

Marc, H. (2010). *The potential of Internet mobilization: An experimental study on the effect of Internet and face-to-face mobilization efforts.* Philadelphia: Routledge Publishing.

Modo, I.V.O. (2006). Youth Empowerment: Lessons from Experience. In Akpan, G.E. & Ekong, C.N. (Eds.), *Youth empowerment for sustainable development*. Uyo: Minder International Publishers.

Muzvidziwa, V.N. (1999).'' Survival of Urban Women under ESAP in Masvingo Zimbabwe.'' *Review of Human Factors Studies, 5*(1 & 2), 115-129.

Mycock, A. & Tonge, J. (2012). ''The Party Politics of Youth Citizenship and Democratic Engagement''. *Parliamentary Affairs, 65*, 138-161.

National Youth Policy of Ghana (2010).'' Towards an Empowered Youth: Impacting Positively on National Development.'' Retrieved from *https://www.Youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/Ghana/*

Not Too Young To Run (2018a).'' Facts and Figures: What do the Numbers Tell Us?'' Retrieved from *http://www.nottooyoungtorun.org/facts/*.

Not Too Young To Run (2018b).'' Statement by the Not Too Young to Run Movement on the Signing into Law of the Age Reduction Bill (Not Too Young To Run) by President Muhammadu Buhari.'' Retrieved from *http://yiaga.org/nottooyoungtorun/26256-2*.

Nweke, E.N. (2005). State, Youth and Electoral Violence in Nigeria. In Onu, G. & Momoh, A. (Eds.), *Elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos: Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA).

Oberschall, A. (2011). Political Mobilization. In Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D. & Morlino, L. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*. California: Sage Publications.

Petré, C. (2015).'' Voices and Views: Middle East and North Africa. ''*World Bank*. Retrieved from http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/tunisian-youth-counter-radicalization-innovation.

Rosenstone, S.J. & Hansen, J.M. (1993). *Mobilization, participation and democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

South African National Youth Policy (2014).'' Definition of Youth.'' Retrieved from *https://www.youth policy.org*

Strandberg, K. (2006). *Parties, candidates and citizens online: Studies of politics on the internet*. Finland: ÅboAkademi University Press.

Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (2010). ''Youth and Youth Policy: A Swedish Perspective.'' Retrieved from *https://www.Youthpolicy.org/national/Swedish_2010_policy.*

Tarrow, S.G. (2011). *Power in movements: Social movements and contentious politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Umar, M.Z. & Danjuma, I.A. (2008). ''The youth, Political Violence and Prospect for Democratic Deepening in Nigeria. ''*A paper presented at the international conference on Nigerian youth, political participation and national development organized by the Centre for Democratic Research and Training (CDRAT) Mambayya House, Bayero University, Kano, 5-6 August*.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2015a). *Human development reports*. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Development Programme (2015b). *Guidance note on constitution-making support*. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2021). *By youth, with youth, for youth*. Paris: UNESCO

United Nations (1948). *The universal declaration of human rights*. Paris: United Nations.

United Nations (1966). *International covenant on civil and political rights*. New York: United Nations.

Whetton, D., Cameron, K. & Woods, M. (1996). *Effective empowerment and delegation: Developing management skills*. London: Pearson Higher Education.

World Bank (2014). *Corporate governance of state-owned enterprises: A toolkit*. Washington DC: World Bank.

YIAGA Africa (2018).'' Facts and Figures: What do the Numbers Tell Us? *Not Too Young To Run*.'' Retrieved from http://www.nottooyoungtorun.org/facts/.

Young Liberal (2012). ''Our History: Young Liberal Movement of Australia.'' Retrieved from *http://www.liberal.org.au/The-Party/Young-Liberals.aspx*.

Author's Profile
Dr Victor Edet Ita is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Akwa Ibom State University. He has contributed several chapters in books and articles in the areas of comparative politics, party and electoral politics, leadership and governance in renowned international and national journals. His recent published researches include (i) Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Democratic Experience: A Survey of South-South Geo-Political Zone (2022); (ii) Military-Civilian Regimes and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria: A Comparative Discourse and Evaluation (2024). Dr Ita is a member of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) and the Association of Nigeria Public Administrators (ANPA).