

Youth Political Participation in Nigeria: A Theoretical Synthesis

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Exploration of political participation as concept and in context is commonplace in political science, political sociology, and other interstitial disciplines, but its exact role and conceptual importance is debated. This study clarifies how political engagement is understood and the activities that constitute it or are included. The paper further explains political participation, first by presenting an outline of how previous literature have interpreted and adjusted the concept. A brief analysis of the core debate on the activities that ought to be recognised as political engagement has also been examined. It zeros in with the analysis of reasons youths engage and some fail to participate in politics in Nigeria.

Keywords: citizenship, activism, participation, civil society and democracy

Introduction

A variety of acts associated with citizenship affect governmental issues or politics, including party politics (activism). These actions, for example, cover the making of an appeal, signing petitions, attending or organising demonstrations, wearing campaign logos or badges, and getting in contact with official policymakers. Equally, electoral turnout is an activity that is most often associated with political engagement. Confronted with these extensive varieties of possible activities, numerous meaningful attempts have been made by scholars to classify political engagement or devise a typology of participation (Hoskins, 2013).

Hansen (2016) and Vite (2018) differentiated between traditional and un-customary participation. Hansen (2016), classified activities conducted by means of traditional, official channels, such as electing or activism as customary, while non-customary activities are organised separately from these channels including demonstration and invasion of workplaces, etc. However, this differentiation is increasingly questioned by modern researchers of political participation in established democratic systems (Norris, n.d.; Lafont, 2014). For instance, Norris (n.d.) contended that in the modern era, approaches used in citizenship to co-operate in politics have significantly changed their repertoires, in terms of the nature of engagement and organisation (the

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agencies by which citizens engage) and the aims or targets (who or what the member targets to influence) of political engagement or participation. For Norris (n.d.) and others (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019a), this means that the difference between customary and uncustomary participation has gradually gone unnoticed.

In the past, uncustomary participation was observed to be an activity undertaken by the insubordinate few against government activities (Soloman, 2008). However, in present times, engagement of protest, demonstrations, picketing, and boycotts, for example, have turned out to be significantly more common (Vite, 2018; Hern, 2016), and to have considerably bigger scope of potential aims, which may involve entrepreneurship, organisations and trying to influence popular belief and conduct (Norris, n.d.). Furthermore, the agencies of engagement have turned out to be considerably more varied than previously assumed, particularly due to modern technology and the exponential boost it has given to correspondence (communication) and association (organisation) (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019b).

Given the basic changes in the approach by which citizens participate politically, suggest that giving a wide definition of what activities constitute political engagement and what fall outside this turned out to be an issue (Forestiére, 2015), particularly with regard to identifying the differences between activities related to political and civil society (Froissart, 2014). The political arena in which participation occurs needs review (Wu, 2014). In the exploration of democratic solidification, Bouma (2014, p. 4) clarified the differences in roles in a political society that comprise the central foundations of political parties, rules of elections, voting, political agendas and leadership, interparty involvements, and law-making bodies and civil society. According to this rigid differentiation, it is only those activities that are clearly political (That is, they are openly organised towards impacting on government policies) should come under the heading of a political society (Beeri, 2013). However, as presented above, numerous activities that citizens participate are not specifically linked with political parties or voters, although in some circumstance they affect political leadership or decision makers.

Also, the overlaps between political and civil society have been assumed to various levels by scholars (Forestiére, 2015). Katsina (2016) differentiated among political and civil society depending on the identity of the actors and the views and aims of different organisations. Katsina (2016) contended that a political society primarily involves the elite class and institutions, while a civil society is the domain of normal citizens. Furthermore, a civil society may look for political influence, unlike the identities in political society, where the objective is not to obtain political influence per se. However, Katsina (2016) acknowledged the intrinsic overlap between civil and political society, and Martin (2012) emphasised the role of organizations, such as youth associations and village groups as part of civil society, reflected in political gatherings, political awareness campaigns, and non-governmental organization (NGO) activities, which can be associated with either political or civil society, or both (Forestiére, 2015).

However, differences between political and civil society might be helpful in exploring the latter, in terms of its apparently low incentive for political participation. Trying to describe civil and political society essentially excludes numerous activities viewed as types of political participation by putting them under civil society heading. For example, in this distinction, many juxtaposing organisations can be gathered together as civil society organisations, such as environmental movements, some of which are part of global agendas to effect major international regulatory and legislative changes, while others address small and localised civic issues. When a group's objective is to change government policies, it is often associated with dispossessed political figures who may have decamped from other formal organisations, while localised and single-issue groups may include serving elected representatives. This becomes a challenge in indicating activities that relate

to civil against political society, thus disengaging them from being viewed as political engagement activities (Bua, 2017).

This paper considers a wide interpretation of political engagement by looking at the vital changes in the collections (repertoires) of political participation and how this links with the engagement approach of the youth. Accordingly, it does not categorise activities as customary or uncustomary or as a component of civil or political society. Rather, as activities whose objectives are to incite some forms of voluntary political change or changes in behaviours targeted towards the general good of the society. This involves conventional types of political participation, for example, voting and party enrolment. In utilising such a comprehensive interpretation, the paper intends to achieve a full perception of how and why youths in Nigeria are included or (excluded from) avoid political participation. Considering that there appears to be limited research in this area, makes this work imperative.

Literature Review and Theoretical Issues

Theory of Democracy and Political Participation

The role of citizens' engagement in politics was the essence of state civilisation in Ancient Greece, most famously epitomised in Athenian democracy (Wallach, 2006). Classical direct democracy (CDD) of citizens as was practiced in Athens is viewed as an accepted democracy (Wallach, 2006, p. 353), which supported the necessity for full engagement of interested citizens in policy formations (Dean, Lindsay, Fielding, & Smith, 2016). From the 20th century, the prevailing structure of the democratic system in Nigeria was organised through liberal democratic system (LDS) (Ikeji, n.d.), underpinned by classical liberal belief in individual freedom, rights of citizenship, and laissez-faire economies (the open market system or free market). However, the meaningfulness of the LDS structure depends on the extent of citizenship engagement with it (Beeri, 2013).

The procedural democratic theory (PDT) of governance posits that citizenship engagement with political issues ought to be limited to voting participation or representation of the electorate (McCaffrie & Akram, 2014). After selecting their delegates, citizens ought to allow them to perform their work of making policies by not interfering. Traditionally, elections are seen as a means of control for corrupt and greedy political representatives (Thiery, 2011). However, from the 1980s, there were calls for a more dynamic and active citizenship participation in democratic governance (Ebeling, 2015).

The procedural perspective of the democratic system implicitly acknowledged that normal citizens are unable to engage properly with political issues, while supporters of participatory democracy promote more active engagement and democratic responsibility or accountability (Ebeling, 2015). Honneth (1998) argued that dynamic or active citizenship engagement can be a very useful guarantee against poor democratic systems, as advocated by McCaffrie and Akram (2014, p. 4).

However, the procedural view is not fundamentally intended to preclude genuine democracy, nor is participatory democracy without problems. There are earnest democratic arguments for procedural government, whereby resolutions or decisions reached and made because of political discussions and thought may support the relations between citizenship and elected delegates, and thus contribute to civil awareness (Honneth, 1998; Doldor, 2014). While democratic participatory theories suggest that citizens inherently yearn to engage (Jackson, 2015), Vite (2018) claimed that some citizens might decline to engage effectively in political issues, and would rather actualize a "furtive" democratic system in which they attempt to avoid notice or attention while elected delegates make policies for them, allowing them to pursue their own activities. In a period of low

levels of formal political participations in acceptable democratic governments, the theory seems to relate more closely with reality compared to participatory democratic government (De Minico, 2013).

Moreover, this study is bolstered by evidence that individuals are not interested and indifferent towards political issues, as previous theories of procedural and furtive democracy neglect to address the question of how to guarantee that elected delegate will not mishandle whatever authority is accorded to them (De Minico, 2013, p. 269). If citizenship is only engaged in elections, there may be long time periods before the activities of elected delegates will be checked (Dzur, 2016, p. 2). Nevertheless, McCaffrie and Akram (2014, p. 8) offered an attractive argument about the doubtful demand of a participatory society, as it does not persuasively challenge the supporting logic for empowering active or dynamic political engagement (Froissart, 2014).

The deliberative (improving collective decision-making) democratic government is the transformation of the ideals proposed by supporters of the participatory democratic government in the 1970s (Vite, 2019a). It is a philosophical paradigm that has been shaped for some years, particularly in response to the seeming deficiencies of modern day liberal democratic government (Vite, 2018). In particular, the distance of the political elite from grassroots citizens and the role of celebrities surrounding party political issues can alienate citizens from engaging in political dialogue (Kosterina, 2016). The necessity for a new kind of political engagement to handle these matters is fundamental to the deliberative (improving collective decision-making) democratic system. These depend on urging citizens to debate and deliberate about political matters in an informal way (Balestri, 2013; Campbell, 2013; Emery, 2016).

The significance of this structure is in increasing the quality rather than the amount of engagement, which is a significant departure from previous experiences of participatory democratic systems (Kosterina, 2016, p. 6). Nevertheless, beliefs vary incredibly among supporters of the deliberative democratic based system towards how to execute, implement, and evaluate the achievement of deliberations (Campbell, 2013; Theis, 2016). Furthermore, these concerns support the significant criticism of deliberative democratic government. Hauptmann (2004) argued that the needs it placed on equality and logical agreement are not realistic (Crick, 2014). For instance, Crick (2014) asserted that deliberation within citizenship can be profitable for increasing the quality of democratic government and policy making, as it stresses the formal methods, which can exclude lot of potential members. Therefore, rather than enhancing access to engagement it conceivably promotes inequality in the system.

In reaction to this, Crick (2014) recommended that informal deliberative methods ought to frame the routes intended to enhance co-operations among political representatives and citizenships. Crick (2014, p. 353) accepted the claims of McCaffrie and Akram (2014), acknowledging their concerns that many citizens would choose not to be politically inclusive, but he disagreed that this would be because political engagement was unattractive. Crick (2014, p. 354) proposed government by political amateurs (non-professionals), introducing citizens into political participation through approaches to which they can relate (Crick, 2014, p. 354). As the ideals of dynamic or active engagement are generally valuable to a democratic system, less emphasis is placed on the quantity of engagement than in established theories of participatory democratic system, and the model is comprehensive, involving citizens in many accounts of deliberative democratic-based systems. Also, this strikes a persuasive balance among deliberative and participatory theories of a democratic system receptive to the characteristics of liberal democratic based systems (Deveaux, 2016). In one sense, Crick's (2014, p. 354) reasoning confers the burden of political amateurs (non-professionals), here the youths to participate in Nigeria's political space.

Models of Democracy in Practice

According to Bua (2017), the pattern of government and non-governmental practice about citizenship engagement has been progressively supportive toward participatory components over established deliberative structures of democracy. These seem to be directly in reaction to the perceived low levels of political gathering enrolment, and voter turnout is especially prevalent in connection to young people's political engagement. Lots of initiatives to support more young people's political inclusion have been guided by such ideas in the education and habit-shaping structure of engagement (Bua, 2017, p. 160).

Bua (2017, p. 168) appeared unsure of the ability to persuade many young people to politically engage through hierarchical structure initiatives organised by NGOs and governments. For example, Harriger (2014) revealed that an initiative to advance young people's political engagement through youth councils in Ogoni area in Niger-Delta was believed to have had mixed outcomes. Furthermore, Doldor (2014) discovered that although the youth who were engaged in the councils turned out to be significant and politically co-ordinated, the ability of the scheme to include non-politically engage young people was limited, affirming similar findings in the US on initiating and energising enthusiasm among youth during voting periods (Felicetti, 2014). This relates to the criticism made by Crick (2014) of formal project development to expand engagement in ways that challenge membership resources. This therefore means that individuals who are willing to engage will be the ones who have the needed time and awareness. However, this does less to readdress the lop-sided balance among those that are willing to engage.

The questions about the ideal approach to motivate and improve young people's political engagement are especially significant to the circumstance of the newer democratic setting in Nigeria (Tonge & Mycock, 2009). Since youths are often the least age group in political engagement in Nigeria (Kingsley, 2013), some projects focused on improving engagement have been initiated by NGOs over recent years in Nigeria (Kingsley, 2013; Vite, 2018). Nevertheless, these are actualized in a hierarchical structure and frequently demonstrated in the global stages of organisations, rendering them less accessible to youth who are willingly engaging (Thiery, 2011).

This is particularly challenging in a post-military era in Nigeria where the functions of political engagement in supporting the current democratic system remain a topic of civil argument (Dommett, 2015). The procedure of democratisation since the change of military government in Nigeria has meant that the structures or institutional features of democratic government are now set up (Vite, 2018). Thus, the non-attendance of citizens' engagement has raised doubt about how "good" this democratic government is with regard to the accountability and responsibility of voted representatives in authority (Diemer & Li, 2011; Osumah, 2016).

Political Participation and Democratization: Nigeria's Youths Context

The change of military administration in Nigeria in 1999 resulted in the Eastern, Southern, and Western regions of Nigeria finding a way to implement the structures or institutional democratic liberal government (Jackson, 2015, p. 2). This has called for a renewed discussion regarding the extent to which political engagement is important for an effective working democratic government system (Andrews, n.d.; Buser, 2013). Initial methods by researchers to determine the accomplishment of democratisation in every region evaluated the implementations of deliberative and procedural features of democratic government (e.g., free and fair elections, structure, and institutional building) have progressively evidenced that regardless of the presence of these essential democratic establishments, the quality of democratic government over these regions varies

significantly (Andrews, n.d.). Therefore, works concerned with evaluating democratic governance calibrated to the procedural basis were criticised by numerous recent studies (Ohiole & Ojo, 2014).

The fundamental point is that the emphasis consolidation put on the result instead of the process means it compared multi-party voting with democratic government, while disregarding the need for a more level democratic government system through citizenship engagement. It is especially challenging based on the findings of various studies on citizenship engagement in newer democratic governments, which observe citizenship to be nonparticipant not only from the formal forms of political engagement, for example, voters and political parties, but also from the form informal structures, such as demonstrations and political protest (Bevir, 2011), and the inclusion of interest groups (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019a).

While procedural democratic government could have been achieved, there are some intractable limitations in responsibility and accountability in terms of true representation by elected delegates (Reeves, 2016). According to Vite and Dibang-Achua (2019a), these have prompted scholars to re-examine the connection between political engagement and democratisation, and to begin to evaluate the quality of the democratic system in Nigeria, considering the scope of possible criteria presented in the articles on consolidation democracy (Bevir, 2011; Vite, 2018). Therefore, unlike consolidation, the research of quality democracy is basically concerned with procedures of democratisation instead of its results (Vite, 2018). Research on quality democracy considers not only the existence of institutions of democratic government, but how viable these are to guarantee responsibility and accountability, support engagement and to continuously enhance political and social-economic equality (Dzur, 2016).

Inside the extended criteria utilised by quality democracy, dynamic, or active political engagement by citizens is often observed as a significant model of better democratic government (Vite, 2018). This is demonstrated by the meaning or definition of quality democratic government system given according to Matiki (2008) and Nkechi (2014), who observed that quality democratic government is high when we view in citizenship engagement broadly not only by elections but also in the life of political gatherings and civil society associations in the debate of public issues, in speaking with and needed responsibility and accountability from the voted representatives, in observing representation in authorities and direct participations with issues of concern at the grass root.

Stressing the significance of diverse representation and the connections between citizenship and delegates, it becomes clear that this democratic method is beyond the procedural base indicators utilised by some accounts of democratic government consolidations and tries to find the same ground with supporters of the democratic participatory system. Irrespective of the broad nature of democracy, its quality or standards have been effectively utilised by researchers in classifications of various types of quintessentially democratic government (Gaffney & Marlowe, 2014).

Thus, this can be presented by utilising quantitative approach as an indicator which is appropriate in measuring and analysing the level to which the Federal Government of Nigeria has implemented procedural democratic system, instead of measuring the unpredictable nature of connections between citizens and government (Udoffia & Godson, 2016; Vite, 2018). Therefore, some research reveals less about the link between political engagement and the procedures of democratisation. Specifically, by depending on data or information that assesses the quantity of political participation in each region compared to a national scale, these studies do not have the ability to give detailed data about region and age particular political engagement patterns, and the influence of the procedures of democratisation in Nigeria (Vite, 2018).

Comprehending how and why youth engage or withdraw from politics is necessary to assay the quality of democratic government. Research in established democratic government systems has observed that the political involvement of youth often varies from that of the older individuals or identities and that the failure on the part of governments to recognise their involvement can prompt sentiments of estrangement and exclusion (Andrews, n.d.). Hence, this can present a gap in the correspondence among citizenship and decision makers and highlights the slow responsiveness of policy to the needs of citizens. These are the main considerations for enhancing quality democracy (Nkechi, 2014; Vite, 2018).

Young people are less visible and included in newer democratic governments compared to mature democratic systems (Freeman, 2013; Gaby, 2016). This mirrors the poor manifestation of citizenship engagement in post-military populations, wherein it is unclear whether the purpose for non-participation stems from the basic political, social-economic modifications caused by democratisation or whether it is an underlying contrast with the patterns of young people's engagement observed in standard (established) democratic systems. This assertion needs to be clarified so that decision makers can respond to the necessities of youth in a newer democratic government system and accordingly enhance the nature and quality of democratic government in Nigeria (Vite, 2018).

Why Youths Participates in Politics in Nigeria

Citizenship participation in politics is a significant element of democratic governance all over the world including Nigeria. The structure and amount of citizenship in political participation can have influence on the degree and quality of government and governance. Quite a number of reasons could be deduced for why many Nigerian citizens particularly the youths participate in politics or engage in governance related activities. They include:

To change the structure of leadership and governance. Obsessed by the leadership styles of past leaders which do not impact positively on the lives of common people on the streets of Nigeria and the continued existence of poverty amidst plenty, the marginalization of some parts of the country and the inequitable distribution of resources, some Nigerian youths participate in politics in order to change the structure in order to herald effective political leadership and envisaged developments. The formulation of more than a hundred political parties and activities of the Civil Liberty Organizations and many interest groups is a pointer to this fact.

To influence government policies and programmes. The revolution—Now by Omoyele Sowore and the various campaigns by organizations like the Social Economic Recovery and Accountability Project (SERAP) and Muslim Rights Concerns (MURIC), as well as demonstrations by Labour and Civil Liberty Organizations has forced government to be up and doing in socio-political issues affect the socio-economic lives of Nigeria. For instance, the agitation by Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) for minimum wage review and whistle blowing action by SERAP have forced government to review workers salaries and recovered stolen funds. The revolution—Now, equally was a conscious expression by youths to intimate the government about the failures of its socio-economic policies and the need to have an inclusive governance capable of affecting peoples' life positively (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019a).

To participate in decision-making process. The sponsorship of private citizen's bill, contributing during public debate of bills, protest, and demonstration by pro-democracy groups are all aimed influencing government decisions. For instance, the Bring-Back-Our-Girls campaigns by Obiageli Ezekwezi, Our-Mumu-Don-Do by Charles Oputa were efforts obviously tailored towards changing the status quo. The

actions of the Bring-Back-Our-Girls Movement on the one hand forced government to do all it could to rescue some of the Chibok girls that were kidnapped by insurgents. On the other hand, Our-Mumu-Don-Do Movement by Charles Oputa also forced the President to cut short his medical trip in Britain in order to attend to the security and other socio-economic challenges bedevilling the country (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019b).

To solicit for leadership roles and representation. Some youth who participate in politics do so in order to be given position of leadership be it through contesting and vying for political offices or being appointed into political offices. The-Not-Too-Young-To-Rule Bill is a welcome development as it affords youth the right to contest election into political offices they were excluded of by virtue of age. Regrettably, as laudable as the idea seems the socio-political structure and process in Nigeria is skewed in favour of the retired elites in military, the intelligentsia and the economic juggernauts.

To agitate for development and social well-being. The activities of SERAP earlier mentioned and other regional pressure groups, such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), Niger-Delta Frontier Force (NDFF), The Ijaw Youth Movements (IYM), Ohanaeze Ndigbo youth wing, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) youth wing, the Afenifere, and the Middle-Belt Forum youth wings have all engaged in one form of agitation and political engagement to draw development to their region. The intense agitation by the IYM through Kaima declaration and the need for government to pacify the youths of the region gave rise to the establishment of the Niger-Delta Development Commission and the creation of the Ministry of Niger-Delta Development. Of recent, efforts by the ACF as well as those of Northern Elders Forum have yielded the creation of North East Development Commission in view of the ravaging impact of terrorism and insurgency in the region. The Middle-Belt is also agitating for the creation of same commission in their region (Vite, 2018).

For political socialization. Youths in Nigeria also engage in politics not only because of economic gains but for socio-psychological reasons. Some of them are subjects to charismatic and renown politicians by so doing learn from them the attitude, principles and secrets of political successes.

Why Youths Avoid Political Participation in Nigeria

Fear of detention by the government. In Nigeria, some youths are apolitical and apathetic about government policies and programmes. The fact that some government officials abhor criticisms and an attempt in doing so always follow with resistance, illegal detention, and violation of the rule of law. Equally, the proscription of socio-political and religious groups as well as enactment of Hate Speech Bill is an indirect way of silencing agitative voices. This further widened youth's aloofness in political engagements.

Fear of maiming, killing, and assassination (political hooliganism). The fear of maiming and politically motivated assassinations has equally contributed to the withdrawal and apathy of some youths in political discourses affecting their areas. Electioneering period in Nigeria is often fraught with killings, kidnapping and assassination of political opponents. The Brigandage of cult groups to accentuate aspirants of their interests has been noticed and has left in the wake the plethora of killings experienced in the country.

Blackmailing. Blackmailing is one characteristic feature of politics in Nigeria. Smear campaign and character assassination and propaganda are correlated with politics. Hence, youths who are rectitudinous and wish to preserve their moral integrity, are most times seen to distance themselves from political participation. This is so as many of them tag politics as "dirty game" meant for political-touts and school drop-outs (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019a).

Indiscipline. The indiscipline among politicians as seen in massive looting of government coffers, wanton, and merciless spending of tax payers' money, brandishing of wealth without reasonableness and the various act of human rights abuses have tended to put off some youths out of political engagements on the one hand and equally inform some youth's engagement on the other hand.

Sabotage. Dishonesty among some youths who engage in politics has equally deterred some from participating. For instance, poor and unwholesome execution of contracts, such as schools, roads, and water projects and supplies has rendered government projects not durable and wasted. The outright vandalism of government property by government officials and their cronies often time makes politics a detestable to some youths (Udoffia & Godson, 2016).

Conclusion

Young people play vital parts in ensuring that they bring change to their society. This they do by political participation through formulation of political parties, vying for political offices as well as vote for others who contest elective positions. However, political engagements depend on the socio-economic and political climate with which politics is played. In Nigeria, politics is expensive, and majority of the youths are poor. Quite a number of them are hostile due to the culture of violence which has characterized the system over the years. Equally, the dominance of the ruling and political class whom they often re-cycled have all affected youth political engagements in Nigeria in no small measure.

Recommendations

To ensure that Nigerian youths participate fully in politics, the following must take place:

1. Adequate security of lives and property must be ensured as Nigerian political space is not safe;
2. De-monetization of politics through vote buying and exorbitant sales of forms. Politics is very expensive in Nigeria, so indigent but educated youth cannot afford the requirements of standing elections in Nigeria except sponsored;
3. Digitalization of some electoral processes like voting. The need to introduce electronic voting into the electoral process no matter the cost is imperative;
4. Constitutional reforms. For instance, the need to recognize zones and rotation of political positions are necessary. Reviewing qualifications and ages for political offices taking the youth into consideration is also important;
5. Appointments of qualified youths into many positions of authorities.

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