

The Place of the Youths in Nigeria's Democratic Leadership, 1999 - 2019

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Abstract

The period 1999 marks the return of democratic rule after the exit of military occupation of Nigeria's leadership space. One of the cornerstones of this turning point is the reintroduction of participatory democracy which, in its practice, accommodates participation and leadership from all qualified citizens. Nevertheless, since 1999, the youths of Nigeria are seemed to have been skewed out of the country's leadership structure. Unarguably, the most repressed and marginalized segment or group in Nigeria since the return of democratic governance is the youth. Consequently, cries of perceived and real marginalization of the youth in leadership have resonated in the country. Against this backdrop, this article examines the place of the youths in Nigeria's leadership and isolates some of the encumbrances inhibiting them from having access to the structures of power. The article attempt to explore and interrogate these and other variegated issues arising from youth political marginalization in Nigeria and suggest a way forward. The article essentially adopts historical cum descriptive and analytical methods of analysis at arriving on a conclusion. The paper argues and demonstrates that youth's political involvement in terms of holding political offices since 1999 is marginal. The article opined that talent infused leadership devoid of age discrimination is the only desideratum to youth political participation and leadership in Nigeria.

Key Words: Youth, Leadership, Democratic Rule, Marginalization, Political Participation

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Introduction

The debate on the place and importance of the youth in leadership of democratic nations has elicited considerable attention from scholars, commentators, policy formulators and international organizations, the world over. This upsurge is in recognition of the fact that democracy is more likely to develop and endure when all segments of a society are free to participate and influence political outcomes without suffering bias or reprisal.¹ Therefore, knowledge of the place of the youth in leadership as a social segment of a democratic nation is very crucial in understanding the control of power and the extent to which individual members of a society participate and get involved in political leadership. This is bearing in mind the fact that democracy as a form of government accommodates all qualified adults and citizens in leadership irrespective of social strata.

In Nigeria, like other emerging democratic sovereigns in Africa, large portion of the population is bars from leadership based on either sex or age. Evidently, a cursory look at the comparative position of the youth in Nigeria's leadership suggests that they are a repressed and marginalized segment of the society. Overtime, the youth have had to contend with this and other social infelicities that alienate them from having access to the structures of power. This explains why cries of injustice and the rise of social movements aimed at ameliorating the level of marginalization perpetuated on youth have resonated in the country. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that this article attempts to assess the place of the youth in Nigeria's leadership and interrogate some of the challenges that inhibits them from having access to the structures of power.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinning

The basic concepts used in this study that deserves clarification are the concept of youth and leadership. The concept of youth is vague, complex, and ultimately ambiguous and remains contentious since scholars and development experts use various parameters to define the term. While others associate youth with freshness and newness, others likened it to a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. As a category, the concept is more fluid than other fixed age groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment depending on a nation's objectives and historical experience. For us in this study, instead of delving into much debate on the concept, it is more rewarding to provide a definitional framework that will serve as a peg for us to hang our wares of analysis. As such, using the age criterion, we conceptualize youth to mean those persons between the ages of eighteen to forty years. This is because people within this age bracket are more agile and constitute a significant proportion of the Nigerian population with direct exposure to the contemporary forces of political and developmental process.² We shall now turn to the concept of leadership.

The concept leadership is one of the most intriguing expressions of human behaviour. Since the beginning of civilization, people have sought answers to the questions of who becomes a leader and why. As such, philosophers, political scientists, and psychologists have produced extensive literature on leaders and leadership, but despite this, there is still no consensus agreement as to the concept of leadership among scholars. As such, we will not allow the

1 National Democratic Institute "Political Inclusion of Marginalized Groups". Accessed online at <https://www.ndi.org/political-inclusion-of-marginalized-groups> (26th September,2020)

2 Ukase, P.I. "Empowerment or Disempowerment? Interrogating the Place of the Youths in Nigeria's Democratic Architecture, 1999-2015" Paper Delivered at a Seminar Organized by the Tiv Youth Liberation Movement (TYLM) Held at J.S. Tarka Institute, Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria, 2017

much debate on the concept of leadership detain us here rather, we will adopt a workable definition that will help us in the analysis in this study.

Leadership refers to the ruling class that bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting up and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory. It is the human element, which operates the machineries of government on behalf of an organized territory. It also include the totality of a political class who hold decision-making positions in social organizations and government, and those with the capacity to manipulate the machineries of government even from behind the scene.³

Interest in leadership has increased during the early part of the twentieth century and this has led to the emergence of many theoretical constructs aimed at explaining the phenomenon. Early leadership theories focused on what qualities that distinguished leaders and followers, while subsequent theories looked at other variables such as situational factors and skill level. In this study, the theory adopted to serve as a guide for analysis is the participative leadership theory. The participative leadership theory is a management theory that has its roots in 1930s in the work of Elton Mayo and others who conducted an experiment at finding ways to improve factory productivity.⁴ According to the theory, when employees in an organization feel supported, they are more satisfied and therefore productive. The theory sought to explain various types and degrees of involvement of employees in decision making in an activity.⁵ The participative leadership theory suggests that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. Here, leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process.⁶ When taken from the standpoint of political leadership, the participative leadership theory will help to underpin not just the tone of politics but also in defining its pattern in the society. In this way, its import is because the theory helps in explaining the type of leadership in Nigeria that sets the parameter of political interest and leadership among the youths.

The Youths in Nigeria's Leadership: A Retrospect

Nigeria has had a checkered history of political developments since the pre-colonial period with the inputs of the youth. Prior to colonial rule, the many ethnic groups that today make up the country lived and functioned as independent political entities that operated as sovereign states with the youths performing profound political roles. Historical documentations have shown that there were situations where the youths did not only contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation but were also involved in the historical struggles of their various communities.⁷ Youth's position in the society were not merely a passive supportive one, but it was equally powerful, constructive and in many times, self-sacrificing.

3 Ogbeidi, M.M. "Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960: A Socio-Economic Analysis" in Journal of Nigeria Studies, Vol.1, No.2., 2012

4 Belyh, A., "Participative Leadership Guide: Definition, Qualities, Pros and Cons, Examples". Accessed online from www.cleverism.com/participative-leadership, 16 March, 2020

5 Hamal, R.B. "Participative Leadership Theory and Its Implication in Educational Administration and Management". Accessed online from www.researchgate.net, 12 February 2020

6 Bolden, R. et al., A Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks. Exeter: Center for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter, 2003

7 Webster, J.B. et al. The Growth of African Civilization, the Revolutionary Years: West Africa since 1800. London: Longmans Group Ltd., 1967

The structure of the country during the pre-colonial era generally positioned the youths according to the cultural orientation of their ethnic groups. The structure of the administration was so arranged that the youths were co-opted to help both the absolute and constitutional monarchs (in the case of kingdoms and empires), and the council of elders (in case of a cephalous states), and in some cases played dominant roles in the day-to-day administration of their societies. However, traditionally, youths assumed specific roles as the military and the police, irrespective of the type of kingdom or society and in some, they ruled with remarkable imprints on the sand of time; few examples suffices.

Historical record of the Second Kanuri Empire (located at present day North East Nigeria) has acknowledge the efforts of a youth, Ghaji Ali Gunama Ibn Bir (1470 – 1503), her ruler. Mai Ghaji have survived, in Kanuri tradition, “[...] the most successful and one of the most effective kings of the saifawa dynasty...More than any other king”.⁸ Also, Ayegba Om’ Idoko, Ayegba the son of Idoko (1614 - 1634), ruled the Igala Kingdom at a youthful age and is today remembered for his military prowess administrative ability. Widely and often referred to as the founder of the present ruling Igala dynasty, Ayegba Om’ Idoko have left a legacy of a good central administration, stable society and good economy. He structured his administration in such a way that the youths, through the office of Ochiokolobia played profound roles in governance.⁹

Other examples are the Tiv youths through the office of Tor-Agbande (drum chief), the first noticeable traditional kingship institution in Tivland. The tor-agbande was an office usually occupied by younger people due to the nature of political and military authority wielded around the office (East 1939).¹⁰ In Yorubaland, especially in the Old Oyo Empire, the office the Ogboni Confraternity that adjudicate for the entire empire comprised mostly of the youths. The Ogboni was said to have wielded strong judicial powers and served as a check against the excesses of Alafin, the paramount ruler.¹¹ Even in the segmentary administrative system of the Igbo people where the council of elders played dominant role in leadership, there are proofs that the youths were part of the governance process.¹² These and seeral other examples that cannot be mentioned here reveals the extent of youth political participation and leadership in the pre-colonial Nigeria until the coming of European colonial rule.

The era of colonial rule in Nigeria was the period of accelerated political activities. The period opened new vista for political participation that for the first time took a national outlook. This was a result of the amalgamation of different ethnic nationalities to form the Nigerian state in 1914 by Britain. The successful amalgamation of territories created for the first time, a sense of feeling towards nationalism and thus shifted emphasis from ethnic parochialism to Nigerian project. As such, many Nigerians, mostly youths and educated elites, canvassed for greater participation in the colonial government of the day. Evidently, youth political participation in Nigeria became more effective during this time. Essentially, the character of politics during colonial rule was gear towards self-rule, granted on October 1, 1960. We shall not go into detail on the role of the youths during colonial rule in Nigeria, as this has been a subject of

8 Eluwa, G.I.C. et al., A History of Nigeria for Schools and Colleges. Onitsha: Africana-First Publishers Limited, 1988

9 Audu, J., “Pre-colonial Political Administration in the North-Central Nigeria: A Study of the Igala Political Kingdom” in European Scientific Journal, Vol.10, No.19.,2014

10 East, R.(ed) Akiga’s Story: The Tiv Tribe as seen by one of its Members. London: Oxford University Press,1939

11 Op.Cit., Eluwa et al 1988

12 Op.Cit. Webster et al. 1968

detailed discussion by other scholars.¹³ The point is that during colonial rule, the youths were part of the governance process and political struggle for the country's independence.

During the post-colonial period, the Nigerian youths showed an unwavering spirit in political participation and leadership. This group of people played critical roles in the governance of the new nation until the military take-over in 1966 thus ending the first republic. However, soon truncated by a counter coup, by Generals Aguyi Ironsi and Yakubu Gowon, who later took over, as Heads of State were equally young military officers. All other ensuing military administrations and the truncated second republic, up to the period of the country's return to democracy in 1999 had the youths in reputable positions of authority.¹⁴ However, the fortunes of the youths began to recede drastically as the country returned to democracy after a long period military occupation of the country's leadership space.

The Youth in Nigeria's Leadership since 1999

The period 1999 marked the return to democracy in Nigeria after a meandering period of military interregnum. The period which would have been an era of re-awakening for an enhanced youth political participation and leadership, turned out to be the period of youth political backwardness in terms of holding political offices. The return to democracy did not brought any change of mind and character of the youth towards politics and leadership. Rather, some institutional and structural policies underwent drastic changes at the disadvantage of the youths. However, efforts to amend the country's constitution to accord the youth full political franchise were made but such gestures were encouraged only because it was to be in the best interest of the older generation to hold on tenaciously to power. At best, one can dismiss it for been a mere façade to hoodwink the youths, as they constitute more than half of the total number of electorates in the country. This explains why the period saw the entrenchment of old politicians who had served the country before now, and/or retired military officers into power through procedures of mock elections that lacks credibility.

To ensure perpetual dominance of the youths, this old class of politicians, "rebranded democrats" and ex-military dictators had to put in place a number of strategies and institutional policies in their favour. For instance, the 1999 constitution prior to the signing into law "Not too Young to Run Bill", the qualifying age of those seeking elective positions in the country's national parliament was put at thirty (30) and thirty five (35) years for Senate and house of Representatives respectively. For the position of the office of the President, Section 131 (b) provides that the contestant must be at least forty (40) years old.¹⁵ This and many other issues constrains the youths from political participation and leadership in the country. We shall return to this issue in the next section. Against this backdrop, holding political offices, involvement in policymaking and political appointment of the youths in the country becomes minimal. This has been the case despite the emergence and support of various youth's organizations like Arewa Youth Forum, Tiv Youth Liberation Movement and recently Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) among others.

Expectedly, after the 1999 general elections only six (representing 16.66 percent) out of the total of (36) states governors elected were in the age category of youth in the country. Thirty state governors representing 83.34 percent were above forty years old.¹⁶ During the 2003 general elections, the fortunes of the youths in politics receded drastically. Just like the

¹³ Uwechue, R. et al. eds. Africa Today. London: Africa Books Ltd.,1991

¹⁴ [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme-Military-Council-of-Nigeri_\(1966-1979\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme-Military-Council-of-Nigeri_(1966-1979)) accessed on 12 February 2020

¹⁵ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999

¹⁶ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> accessed on 20 January 2020

preceding dispensation, the political arena in Nigeria by 2003 remained largely the affairs of the older politicians. During these elections, out of the thirty-six states governors elected, none was a youth. This was the same situation during 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections.

In the legislature, both at the state and national level, the percentage composition of the youth are unimpressive considering their numerical strength. In the Senate and House of Representatives (HoR) for instance, youth's membership composition have been inconsequential. Out of 109 Senators and 360 House of Representative members in the country, the majority use to be old politicians who are either former military dictators or ex-governors. In fact, from 1999 not until 2007 no youth was elected as the leader of the two houses. It was in 2007 that a youth, Dimeji Bankole, from Abeokuta South Federal Constituency, elected as the Speaker, House of Representatives (HoR). He is being the youngest and only speaker (HoR) of youthful age in Nigeria.¹⁷ In the Upper House, that is House of Senate, no youth has ever assume the position of Senate President, Deputy Senate President, or held any principal office. This is the same with the state legislature as few youths have blaze the trail. In terms of appointment in exalted political offices, no youth has been appointed to head a federal parastatal or as a minister. At a state level, it is in recent time that few youths have been appointed as commissioners in some states, the most recent been the appointment of Miss Joana Kolo Nnazuwa as Commissioner for Sports and Youth Development by Kwara State government.

In terms of appointments in political party offices and in the government, the youths have not been fortunate. The exception has been that Deji Adeyanju once appointed as the national new media director of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), while Rinsola Abiola (a female youth) appointed as special assistant on new media to the speaker, Federal House of Representatives. She was also a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC) board of trustees and acting president, APC young women forum. Meanwhile Tony Okechukwu of the PDP in Anambra State had rose from Assistant Secretary of party to its state chairperson in 2006.¹⁸ Meanwhile, during the period of voter's registration exercise it is expose that the youths aged between 18 and 35 years comprised of 51.11% of the total number of registered voters and a high percentage of the youths contested for different positions of authority in Nigeria.¹⁹

Nevertheless, while the youths are increasingly getting involved in politics, the percentage of success recorded by them has remained unimpressive. Their leadership opportunities are still minimal as compared to the older politicians. Thus, given the marginal level of youth's political involvement in holding political offices since 1999, the few that blaze the trail in different capacities are face with many challenges. These challenges arise majorly because of the domineering influence of the unsympathetic old politicians that hold the country hostage with no regard to the future of the teeming Nigerian youths, politically and otherwise. What we need to stress here is that the place of the youths in Nigeria's leadership is very marginal and is not a true and fair representation of the youths in Nigeria's leadership structure.

The Challenges of Youth Political Leadership in Nigeria

The youths in Nigeria are face with both institutional and mundane challenges that inhibit them from having access to the structures of power and leadership in Nigeria. The challenges

17 Bulacan, A. "Nigeria Parliament Elects New Speaker of the House", Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (1999 Amended), AHN Media, 2007

18 <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/05/nwoye-dumps-pdp>.

19 Report of the 2019 General Elections, Independent National Electoral Commission (2019)

as is considered in this article are age barrier, poverty, the predominance of the ruling elites, god-fatherism, gender inequality and political party defections among other succinct issues.

Age barrier has been one of the limiting factors for the youth in ascending to positions of authority in the leadership of this country. Recall that the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) had pegged age thirty (30) and thirty five (35) years as qualifying age for those seeking election into the country's national parliament; House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. For the office of the President, the constitution insisted that the contestant must be at least forty years of age. No doubt, this informs the predominance of the leadership of old men and women since 1999. More appalling is the fact that this type of leadership remains unsympathetic to the yearnings of the youth for leadership until the arousal of the Not too Young to Run Movement in 2017.

The prevalence of poverty in Nigeria especially among the youth is worrisome. Most youths in the country live beyond poverty line thus suggesting why many have become a frustrated lot. It is apposite to emphasize that high rate of poverty among the youths in Nigeria disempower them from political contest thereby limiting their chances of assuming leadership. What is more is that political parties have pegged too much money on the acquisition of nomination and interest forms for political contest. This did not only militate against youths political ambitions but has diminished their interest in politics. As result of poverty, frustrated youths have become canon folders in the hands of the political elites in perpetuating violence witnessed in the country during and after electioneering process. This and several other issues are inimical to an enhanced youth political participation necessary for assuming leadership positions in the country giving that the country's politics is highly monetized. It is apt to stress that the monetization of the country's political process is a discouraging factor that should not be handle with kid gloves if the marginalized section of the youths given a chance.

Apart from this, the predominance of the ruling elites in politics of the nation is a limiting factor against the youths. Suffice is to say that the ruling elites have dominated the country's leadership structure since the return to democracy and have held on tenaciously to power. To ensure their perpetual dominance, they have deliberately influenced some institutional policies to be in their favour not minding the plight of the country's teeming youth. For instance, the 1999 constitution of the country spelt out age eighteen (18) years as the qualifying age for citizens of the country to vote, but did not as well grant them the permission to contest. To further ostracize the youth, the method to change the constitution is made rigid, requiring two third majority of the parliament for its amendment. By implication therefore, it become cumbersome for the few youths who are in the country's legislature to mobilize themselves into workable pressure groups to alter the clause on the requisites age for contestants to favour them. Therefore, a large chunk of the youths was almost disenfranchise based on their age.

In another calculated ploy to hold onto power, the ruling elites patronize themselves both in kind and in cash to remain relevant in the political cycle. Whenever they find that their fortunes are drastically receding, they realign themselves euphemistically dubbed as party decamping. This they do to assuage support for their diminishing political relevance from unsuspecting electorates not minding whose ox is gore. Furthermore, they fight anything that is on their way at assuming political authority. This they do by adopting and using Machiavellian style of survival of the fittest; the worse form of democracy to practice in a sane society. Consequent upon the dominance of the ruling elites is the emergence of the phenomenon of "god-fatherism" which has eaten deep in the fabric of the nation's democratic practice.

Godfatherism is a corrupt political practice based on clientalism in, which a godson must localize within the circle of the elites, a godfather, who is wealthy, influential and has the wherewithal of manipulating and highjacking the political system in their favour. By this tactic, leadership has continued to be obtained from this pool of corrupt leaders with no clear-cut ideologies that have impact on youth leadership ascendancy. In fact, godfatherism has encouraged sycophancy among political minded youths. This often times manifest in gerrymandering through violent conflicts witnessed across the length and breadth of the nation. The remorseful state of the youth in the hands of the godfathers is that godfatherism in its intent and purpose discourages leadership recruitment among the youth as is done in advanced democracies of Western Europe.

Gender inequality simply connotes the perpetuation and predominance of masculinity over femininity. In other words, gender inequality depicts the exploitation and oppression of women in all aspect of national life. In the construction of power matrix, it connotes the marginalization of the female gender in politics. This consists of the privileges, which men enjoy to the prejudice of women such as being richer and more powerful or even in positions to exact obedience.²⁰ This explains why few women in Nigeria have assumed leadership. In line with this argument is the position of Ogiji who posits that “the world of political participation is the world of machismo; an aggressive masculine pride with abusive attitude toward women”.²¹ The consequence of this act of repression and suppression of women in politics on youth political participation is that women are marginalize in the political process; women of youthful age are automatically disenfranchise thus reducing the number of youths in politics. As a result, youth strategic interests and concerns are never adequately mainstream in the political power equations; this further prevents the youths from having access to leadership.

Last but not the least is political party defections inherent in the country's political lexicon. Political party defection as a phenomenon in Nigerian politics is the aligning and realigning of political elites across party divides with the intent of remaining relevant in politics especially when the fortune of such elite in a political party is fast receding. This can be by defecting from the opposition political party to the ruling party or vice versa depending on the circumstance, but most importantly, to launder a diminishing career and to assuage and dissuade supporters to their camps. This practice has emasculated and dwindled the fortune of the youth in politics, as this is to serve the selfish desires of the defectors. Thus, the practice of party defection is responsible for youth political marginalization and restricts their leadership attainment.

Grappling with the Challenges

The receding fortunes of the youth in Nigeria's leadership like other sub-group in the country can be address through the institutionalization of some reforms with legal backing in favour of the youths. First is constitutional and legal reform. Suffice is to say that Nigerian youths are constrained by the provision of the country's constitution on the requisite age for political office contestants as mentioned earlier. Until May 2017 when the qualifying age for public offices was reduce through the passing into law the Not too Young to Run Bill, quite a number of youths with leadership capability and political inclination were skewed out of the political process. The success recorded by the reduction of age for political office holders

²⁰ Ogiji, P., “Gender Integration and the Socio-Economic Construction of Politics in Nigeria: A Generic Approach” in Okpeh, O.O. Jr. and Sha, D.P. eds. *Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007

²¹ Ibid.,

notwithstanding, the youths through advocacy as it was the case with the Not too Young to Run Movement should sponsor a bill to limit the age for all political offices in the country. This will not only increase youth chances in leadership but will reduce the predominance of the ruling elites in the political landscape of the country (we shall return to the issue of the elites soon). This should initiate at the federal, state and local government levels, and institutionalize as a practice in all political parties. If the issue of age barrier is successfully handle, the fortunes of Nigerian youths in leadership will be on the increase.

We have established earlier that the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria and among the youth coupled with the monetized nature of Nigerian politics inhibit the youths from assuming leadership positions. In fact, the high cost of nomination/interest forms and the monetization of the system not only inhibit the youths from assuming leadership position but also has dwindled their fortunes. To ameliorate this challenge therefore, the cost of nomination/interest forms and election financing should be drastically reduce to accommodate the financial status of all interest groups. Moreover, the youths should be empowered so to improve their wellbeing in the society and to increase their political relevance. Alternatively, the youths can rely on crowd funding from supporters. This can be achieve through the establishment of fund raising advocacy groups focused on backing young contestants seeking political offices.

We have also argued that the preponderance of the ruling elites as a recurring decimal in the leadership of the country did not only militate against leadership of youthful age in Nigeria but also facilitate the entrenchment of elitist patronage. In order to change the status quo, youth political groups within political parties should unite, utilize their numerical advantage, identify, recruit and support credible youths with proven potentials as party leaders/flag bearers before and during elections in order to reduce the overwhelming dominance of the old people in leadership. It is also expedient that political parties open wider space for youth political inclusiveness. This can be attain by democratizing leadership structures in the party and financing mechanisms to accommodate increased participation of the youth aspiring for leadership.

In addition, the politics of godfatherism as it is been practiced in the country should be abolished so to open more windows for the youths in leadership. In place of godfatherism, merit-based political culture should institute to encourage fair play and democratization of leadership where the youth be given fair representation. On the other hand, all political parties should make room for youth wings where younger politicians be recruited into leadership based on merit. If this is ensure, the phenomenon of godfatherism will be greatly reduce in the country's political practice.

The gender gap between male and female in Nigeria is another inhibiting factor for youth political participation and leadership. Hence, for politics to achieve maximum potentials and bring about full participation of the female gender, this gap has to be fill up. Gender mainstreaming at the political level is therefore a recipe for enhanced political participation of young women in the country. This can be secure in such a way that will guarantee full franchise of the women and will encourage them to participate in politics. In addition, women, through petitions and advocacy should seek for the repeal of all cultural practices that marginalize them in the social and political fabrics of their communities.

Finally, in this analysis, it is highlighted the impact of political party defections on youth political under-representation in leadership of Nigeria. In order to ameliorate this challenge, the youths should organize themselves into workable pressure groups and canvass for the passage of bill for independent candidature. The bill when sponsored will provide the

opportunity for young contestants to compete without recourse to involvement in tedious party systems where the elites who defects later abandon them to other political parties. This will even limit the level of political party defections in Nigeria and encourage stable political bargaining in the system.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the youths were very active in the politics of pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Nigeria and have been part of leadership structure until 1999 when the country reverted to democracy. It is sad to state that in the contemporary world where political landscape is rapidly changing in favour of the youths, a plethora of encumbrances such as is highlighted in this study are exerting profound impact on youth's political participation and representation in Nigeria's leadership structure. As such, the imperativeness of creating an enabling environment for youths that will translate to leadership has been discussed in this study. Giving the marginal level of the youth in Nigeria's leadership, there is urgent need for a complete overhaul of the system. Hence, talent infused leadership devoid of age discrimination is recommended as the only desideratum to youth political participation and leadership in Nigeria. It is hoped that this article contributes to the burgeoning literature on youth political participation in Nigeria.

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