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ASSESSMENT OF THE NOT TOO YOUNG TO RUN LAW ON THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, as in numerous democracies globally, active political engagement holds significant sway. It profoundly shapes the functioning of governmental affairs within the society, playing a pivotal role in determining the allocation of resources and opportunities among the populace. The exclusion of the youth demographic from political power corridors in numerous democracies has unquestionably sparked widespread concern. This paper thus delves into the 'Not Too Young To Run law,' which was introduced to broaden the scope of youth representation and inclusivity in government. The objective was to ascertain whether the law has effectively promoted youth political participation and representation within the country. This paper adopts the elite theory to assess the success of the Not Too Young To Run Law on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria while the study utilized discourse analysis which is a qualitative research method that scrutinizes written and spoken content beyond its technical aspects. The study findings reveal a noteworthy surge in youth political involvement, aspirations, and successful emergence into elective positions during the 2023 general elections. This upturn is attributed to the effective implementation of the Not Too Young To Run law in Nigeria, notwithstanding associated challenges. The study recommended that the Too Old To Run bill should be enacted into law, the Independent Candidature bill should be enacted, and the youths should engage in the power structure of political parties and contest for political offices to influence more decisions to favour aspiring youth within their respective parties.

Keywords: Youth, Marginalization, Not Too Young To Run Law, Elections, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, like numerous other democratic systems worldwide, political participation holds significant importance, wielding a profound impact on the governance of the society and influencing the allocation of resources among its populace. This trend is mirrored globally, where the youth demographic constitutes over seventy per cent (70%) of the total population. Consequently, participation and representation within the political sphere of a democracy like

Nigeria are supposed to be influenced by the dominance of the youth demographic, which forms the majority share of the country's overall population. The youth demographic is an integral and inseparable component of Nigeria, accounting for approximately 70% of the population, with the majority being under the age of 30 (Akinyemi and Mobolaji, 2022). Despite constituting a significant majority of the population, the youth demographic finds itself underrepresented in the political echelons, with older political figures occupying key elective positions, aligning with the primordial prioritization of the public over the civil public as articulated by Peter Ekeh (1975). The sense of marginalization has spurred a call for increased youth representation in the political sphere, leading to the widespread advocacy for the Not Too Young To Run movement across the country. In concordance, some young people in Nigeria launched a campaign in 2016 to agitate for the removal of the age barrier to run for elective political offices which will further give young people the avenue to contest for and wield elective political positions. The Not Too Young To Run campaign was championed by YIAGA Africa; a youth-based civil society organization seeking to promote good governance and youths' substantial participation in politics, the campaign soon boasted of support from more than 100 youth organizations and became popularly known by its hashtag #NotTooYoungToRun#, thereby facilitating legislative actions and was eventually signed into law in 2018 under president Muhammadu Buhari's administration (Moses 2019). As a result of experienced marginalization of youths from political arrangements and elective positions, the public political offices are dominantly occupied by a minority older generation who keep recycling themselves to remain in power, using the instrument of godfatherism and thriving in corrupt aggrandizements as an element of statecraft thereby relegating the interests of the youths who ordinarily are supposed to be in the positions of authority having wielded majority of the population.This problem became a matter of national attention which resulted in the passage of the "Not Too Young To Run" law in 2018. This work therefore is aimed at assessing the impact of the Not Too Young To Run law on youth's political participation in Nigeria using the 2023 general elections as a reference.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE NOT TOO YOUNG TO RUN LAW

Over the years, there have been constant agitations for the expansion of youth involvement in decision-making capacities around the Globe. This stems from the fact that youths having possessed a greater percentage of the entire population of the world vis-a-vis their physical capacity and intriguing technological exposure have been long excluded from holding important positions in the national political space in different nations (United Nations, 2012). In the last decade, there arose a paradigm shift which drove universal clamours for greater youth inclusion in the political composition of nations around the world. The Not Too Young To Run is an act of parliament which sought to reduce the age requirement to run for elective political offices in Nigeria. It began as youth political advocacy with a popular hashtag #NotTooYoungToRun# which was launched by a group of young people in Nigeria led by Samson Itodo and Tony Nwulu in 2016 (YIAGA Africa, 2018). Following the above in 2016, the United Nations Youth Envoy initiated the worldwide "NotTooYoungToRun" campaign in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, International Parliamentary Union (I.P.U), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, YIAGA, and the European Youth Forum (Mona and Mary, 2018). The legislative support for the Not Too Young To Run campaign was secured in Nigeria through the sponsorship of the bill by Hon.

Tony Nwulu in the House of Representatives and Sen. Abdul-Aziz Nyako in the Senate (YIAGA Africa, 2018).

The Not Too Young To Run Law alters sections 65, 106, 131, and 177 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, resulting in a modification of age requirements for candidacy in various political offices across the nation. Consequently, the law lowers the age eligibility for running for the state House of Assembly and House of Representatives from Thirty (30) years to Twenty-five (25) years, for the Senate and Governorship from Thirty-five (35) years to Thirty (30) years, and for the office of the president from Forty (40) to Thirty-five (35) years.The primary rationale behind the enactment of the Not Too Young To Run Law was to dismantle the longstanding barrier of youth marginalization in the Nigerian political sphere. This law aimed to broaden the representation of young individuals in significant political roles by lowering the age requirements, thereby enabling younger aspirants to vie for crucial political positions across the country. Unsurprisingly, the dynamics of youth political participation in the country have undergone a shift since the implementation of the Not Too Young To Run Law.As an expression of hope, a former Nigerian Senate President, Bukola Saraki at the celebratory conference held one month after the passage of the bill posited that the Not Too Young To Run Law symbolizes the vitality inherent in our youth, emphasizing that the time for the youth is today, not tomorrow (Mona and Mary, 2018). His statement suggests a glimmer of optimism, signalling that the political landscape is now receptive to recognizing the contributions and capabilities of the younger generation in the country.

Youth Political Participation in Nigeria

Substantial participation of young people in the Nigerian political landscape has been in play since the conception of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Nigeria's political history cannot be comprehensively narrated without pointing to the records of youth participation and its roles in shaping the political dynamics of the country since the colonial era, across the first, second and third Republics as well as during military regimes. The youths were the first to respond to the call of Western education in the colonial era; this enabled them to gather relevant knowledge which eventually empowered them to stand firm against colonial hegemony and to participate in colonial politics to gather the experience needed to lay the blocks for self-rule (Hamzat and Ali, 2016). Also, Afolayan (2018) held that the Nigeria independence struggle was vehemently spearheaded by then-young Nigerian students including Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe whose commitment and significant efforts saw the Nigerian state through the path of emancipation from colonial authority. They began the struggle as student union activists and later graduated to full-fletch political activists. In 1953, the motion for Nigeria's independence was first moved by Chief Anthony Enahoro at the age of twenty-one. He was subsequently appointed Federal Commissioner of Information while he was below the age of 30 Moses (2019). The transfer of power from the military to civilians in 1999 has driven Nigeria into a situation where familiar politicians who have been in the corridors of power since their youthful age still circulate themselves and remain gum to political positions even in old age. Hence, older political actors have saturated successive elections, especially at the federal and state levels, thereby depicting a system that encapsulates the whims and caprices, as well as the elitist interest of the older political drivers throughout the country, while young people were marginalized and restricted from taking relevant political offices majorly based on age dichotomy and lack of experience claims. From experience, only a few people under the youth bracket have been

given inconsequential political appointments such as special assistants or advisers, aids, and commissioners, while the older political actors dominated elective offices Moses (2019).

Until recently, the youths have been supplementary participants in Nigerian politics where young people have been played to remain servants and tools of unconventional political activities to the older politicians. The development of the Not Too Young To Run Law was then tailored to bridge the gap of youth marginalization in the representative government and bring capable young citizens on board for adequate representation of the population majority which consists of young people.

However, it can be said that the problem of youth marginalization in the Nigerian power structure has been addressed sequel to the introduction of the Not Too Young To Run Law and that has resulted in increased percentage of youths' political aspirations and the emergence into elective offices as experienced in the 2023 general elections in the country; that does not denote that the problem of youth marginalization has been fully addressed because the percentage of young persons in elective positions is minute compared with the percentage of the older politicians in elective offices as of today. Although progress is made to improve youth representation in government, the older political elites have however devised other strategies such as godfatherism and monetization of party primaries as alternative mechanisms to restrict young aspirants from attaining political victory into important offices like that of the president and governor. The feasibility of that is premise on the challenges faced by common citizen; these youths are financially unfit to finance their political ambitions like the older politicians who are typically referred to as 'the money bags'.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts the elite theory to assess the impact of the 'Not Too Young To Run Law' on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. The theory is a classical analytical framework attributed to notable theorists such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels, James Burnham, Floyd Hunter, Wright Mills, and others (Ikalewumi and Olaniran, 2021).

The Elite theory posits the presence of a select group wielding predominant influence in society, exerting control over political, social, economic, and other domains. The contours of public policy are shaped by the elite of the state, with state institutions effectively governing in alignment with the preferences of the inner circle of the state (Mosca, Kahn, and Livingston, 1939; Mollenkopf, 1975; Chris, 2010).

The aforementioned theory gains relevance in elucidating the impact of the Not Too Young to Run law on youth political participation in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. The level of participation of the youth demographics in the 2023 General Election is determined by the state elites' willingness to allow the Not Too Young to Run Law to have practical expression on the political environment in Nigeria for youth inclusivity.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized discourse analysis to examine the extent of youth engagement and participation in the democratic process in Nigeria. Discourse analysis considered a qualitative research method, scrutinizes written and spoken content beyond its technical aspects (Salkind, 2010) cited in (Ikalewumi and Olaniran, 2021). This research employed discourse

analysis by analyzing data sourced from journal articles, newspapers, and government gazettes.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

THE NOT TOO YOUNG TO RUN LAW AND THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION

Since the formal enactment of the Not-Too-Young-To-Run law in 2018, which lowered the age requirement for seeking public offices, there has been a surge in hopes and expectations among young individuals aspiring to run for elective positions. The enactment of this law has sparked commendable interest from many young Nigerians in vying for public offices, as evident in the 2023 elections. The political landscape in Nigeria has undergone notable changes in the wake of the Not Too Young To Run law, particularly in the political recruitment process.

The implementation of this law has eliminated age restrictions that previously impeded young Nigerians from seeking political offices nationwide. The undeniable impact of the law on the 2023 General Election in Nigeria is evident, as it not only allowed youths to participate more comprehensively but also enabled them to contest elective offices. This has further solidified participatory democracy in the country. Contrary to the circumstances before the law's enactment, records indicate that numerous young Nigerians successfully secured elective political offices across the country in the 2023 General Election as a result of the implementation of the Not Too Young To Run Law in 2018. This has changed the narrative of youth political aspirations, involvement, and representation in Nigeria, as we can now observe the presence of young lawmakers in both the National Assembly and state Houses of Assemblies. This signifies that the law has elevated youth representation in the Nigerian political sphere, offering opportunities for young individuals to run for various political offices and emerge victorious in the 2023 general election in the country.

As announced by INEC, the 2023 Governorship and House of Assembly elections saw the emergence of 26-year-old Rasheed Kashamu, who now represents Ijebu North Constituency 1 in the Ogun State Assembly. In a similar vein, 26-year-old Rukayat Shittu secured a position in the Kwara State House of Assembly, while Muhammad Adamu Oyanki, also 26, claimed victory to represent the Doma North constituency in the Nasarawa State Assembly (Ogaga, 2023). Additionally, Adebo Ogundoyin, elected as the Oyo State House of Assembly Speaker at the age of 32 in 2019, was re-elected in 2023 at the age of 36, becoming the first to hold the position for two consecutive terms in the history of the Assembly (Aliyu, 2023). Beyond the emergence of young leaders in state Houses of Assembly during the 2023 elections, several Nigerian youths also secured seats in the lower Legislative Chamber of the nation. Ibrahim Bello Mohammed, aged 27, achieved an electoral victory in 2023 to represent the people of Birnin-Kebbi, Kalgo, and Bunza federal constituency in the House of Representatives, making him the youngest elected lawmaker in the history of the country's National Assembly (Usman, 2023). Additionally, Asuquo Ekpenyong, at the age of 37, became the youngest Senator with his victory in representing Cross River South Senatorial District in the 10th Nigerian Senate, a feat made possible by the presence of the Not Too Young To Run Law (Alimi, 2023).Based on the significant successes recorded by the youths as a result of the new law it is evident that substantial strides have been made to alleviate the issue of youth marginalization in Nigerian politics.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NOT-TOO-YOUNG-TO-RUN LAW IN NIGERIA

The Not Too Young To Run law holds equitable cause to remove the age barrier that has restricted the youths from contesting for elective offices despite their numerical demography. The findings from the 2023 general election show that the youths have made a commendable impact on youth representation in government. Despite the achievements attributed to the enactment of the law in the paper, various factors have hindered its overall success in Nigeria.

The issue of conflicting entanglement stemming from personal interests: Society is increasingly becoming disorganized, allowing individuals who are aged and unfit for certain responsibilities to take on roles they are incapable of handling. For instance, individuals aged 50 and above are seen vying for the position of youth chairman in a community and leadership roles in the youth wing of a political party (Ibeh, 2014). The problem stems from the older generation's reluctance to relinquish their hold on the political arena, hindering the entry of the younger generation. While the enactment of the Not Too Young To Run Law is crucial, it is equally essential for the country to consider implementing the Too Old To Run Law. If there is a retirement age for engineers, doctors, teachers or other civil servants across the board because when they get old, they are no longer productive enough to be able to deliver adequately within their confines, then it is proper that there should be an age limit for people to contest for public office. When we consider someone who is above 60 or 65 years as too old to serve in the civil service; it takes only common sense to restrict anyone above 65 to serve in more demanding capacities particularly offices of the president and state governors which are more serious, tasking, rigorous, and enshrined with elaborate duty in the country.

Godfatherism: Since gaining independence, the influence of godfatherism has consistently impeded credible elections and good governance. Additionally, it has significantly undermined the effective implementation of the Not Too Young To Run Law in Nigeria, standing as one of the most pervasive challenges to youth participation in Nigerian politics. Political godfatherism is a longstanding phenomenon in Nigerian politics, with the country being one of its epicentres for decades (Nwobi and Funmilayo, 2024). The influence of godfathers in political recruitment and career advancement has significantly hampered the effectiveness of youth participation in politics, as the aspirations of young individuals often get sidelined in favour of candidates endorsed by these influential figures. This not only impairs political development, it is also an impediment to democratic consolidation in the country. Hence, godfatherism has become a cankerworm that feeds on the systemic arrangement of gods-servant or gods-sons placed at different levels of political positions. Apart from combating the intending goals of the Not Too Young To Run Law, the existing relationship between godfathers and godson has been responsible for poor institutions in Nigeria and it has denied the electorates the choice of preferred candidates to represent them in political authority (Osakede et al, 2016; Nwobi and Funmilayo, 2024). The godfathers in the political setting are men who have the power and influence to decide both who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins the elections; a political 'landlord' only carries the godson who is always loyal to his dictates as a candidate and will remain loyal when he ascends office (Rasak, Oye and Ake, 2017). In the same vein, the 71-year-old president of Nigeria Bola Ahmed Tinubu while addressing APC delegates in Abeokuta in 2022 boasted of having single-handedly made Muhamadu Buhari president in 2015, Yemi Osinbajo vice president in 2015 and Dapo Abiodun governor of Ogun State in 2019; It was on that premise that he, therefore, stated in the Yoruba language that “Emi L’okan” meaning “it is my turn”

to lead the nation (Bello and Agobiambu,2022).From this picture, the existence of godfatherism in Nigerian politics remains a huge challenge to the good intentions of the law put in place to provide youths with an avenue to ascend political power in the country.

Money-Centric Politics: Another challenging factor for young Nigerians in the political arena is monetization. This involves the use of money influence to assert and buy one's way into political power through the bribing of delegates, vote buying and other dynamics of electoral malpractices. Money influence has for many years dominated the process of political candidacy and electioneering in the country, thereby relegating those who may have political aspirations but without a financial stronghold or backing for extravagant political expenses. Over the years, scholars have argued that the negative impact of money politics has exposed the country to decadent political culture and leadership vicissitudes which has remained evident in the country, reflecting on party campaigns and patronage sponsorship which are conceived as political investments by the old political actors. The candidates upon victory in turn reimburse the election expenses with public funds regardless of the damages it poses to the administrative capacity needed to provide social welfare of the citizens. For instance, the personal Assistant on social media to President Muhammadu Buhari alleged that the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar bribed the party delegates with a whooping sum of N24 billion to emerge as the party flag bearer for the 2019 general elections (Ogbette et al., 2019). Practically, many young persons who have been nursing one political ambition or the other have no such huge money to invest into the contest; the political race more often than not is, therefore, unfavourable to the youth (Abdullahi and Saka, 2023). Lately, the two major political parties in Nigeria, namely the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), have been selling nomination forms priced between 100,000 and 100,000,000 million naira, respectively. This implies that only individuals with such substantial financial resources would be able to participate in the electoral contest (Abdullahi and Saka, 2023).Therefore, it is reasonable to affirm that Nigerian politics is heavily influenced by monetary considerations. Consequently, older politicians tend to exclude the youth from political significance by leveraging financial muscle, aiming to perpetuate their elitist design as an instrument of statecraft. This poses a significant challenge to the objectives of the Not Too Young To Run Law in the Nigerian political landscape.

Table 1.1 Nominations and Expression of Interest Forms of PDP and APC between 2015 and 2023

Year	Positions	PDP/Amount	APC/Amount
2015	President Governorship Senate House of Representatives State House of Assembly	N22 million N11 million N4.5 million N2.5 million N1.2 million	N27.5 million N5.5 million/N10.5 million N3.3 million/N5.3 million N2.2 million/N3.2 million N550,000/N800,000

2019	President Governorship Senate House of Representatives State House of Assembly	N12 million N6 million N3.5 million N1.5 million N600,000	N45 million N22.5 million N7 million N7 million N850,000
2023	President Governorship Senate House of Representatives State House of Assembly	N40 million N21 million N3.5 million N2.5 million N600,000	N100 million N50 million N20 million N10 million N2 million

Source: Abubakar and Shadrack (2023).

Table 1.1 according toAbubakar and Shadrack (2023) indicates the fees for expression of interest and nomination forms for various political offices over the years. In the case of the PDP, the cost for the office of the President was N22 million in 2015, decreased to N12 million in 2019, and then increased to N40 million in 2023. For the APC, the corresponding fees were N27.5 million in 2015, rising to N45 million in 2019, and further escalating to N100 million in 2023. Governorship aspirants in the PDP paid N11 million in 2015, N6 million in 2019, and N21 million in 2023. On the other hand, APC gubernatorial aspirants, both incumbent and non-incumbent, paid varying amounts, with incumbents contributing N10.5 million in 2015, N22.5 million in 2019, and N50 million in 2023.

For the Senate, PDP aspirants paid N4.5 million in 2015, and N3.5 million in 2019, and maintained the same amount in 2023. Meanwhile, APC senatorial aspirants exhibited fluctuations, with incumbents paying N5.3 million, non-incumbents contributing N3.3 million in 2015, N7 million in 2019, and N20 million in 2023. PDP House of Representatives aspirants paid N2.5 million in 2015, N1.5 million in 2019, and N2.5 million in 2023. In contrast, APC House of Representatives aspirants, including both incumbents and non-incumbents, paid varying amounts, with incumbents contributing N3.2 million, non-incumbents paying N2.2 million in 2015, N3.85 million in 2019, and N10 million in 2023.

Finally, PDP aspirants for the State House of Assembly paid N1.2 million in 2015, N600,000 in 2019, and maintained the same amount in 2023. On the APC side, State House of Assembly aspirants paid varying fees in 2015, with incumbents contributing N800,000 and non-incumbents paying N550,000. In 2019, the fee increased to N850,000, and in 2023, it further rose to N2 million. The data presented in the table indicates that the costs of expression of interest and nomination forms by the two major political parties have exceeded the financial capability of the majority of Nigerian youth, particularly in the face of the prevailing crises of unemployment and poverty.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

The continual marginalization of young individuals within Nigerian political structures spurred a call for greater inclusion of the youth in positions of political power. Gaining

national prominence with their demand for inclusivity, the Nigerian government took responsive action by enacting the Not Too Young To Run Law. This legislative initiative aimed to open avenues of opportunity for young Nigerians to actively participate in electoral processes by lowering the age requirements for running for elective offices at various government levels nationwide. The paper evaluates the tangible impact of the law on the dynamics of the 2023 general election in Nigeria. The findings indicate that, to an unprecedented level, young Nigerians have successfully secured elective positions throughout the country during the 2023 general election. According to INEC, this electoral cycle has observed the highest percentage of youth participation in the overall electioneering processes. However, the experience of youth politicians before and during the 2023 general election was not without challenges and restrictions like godfatherism interplay and monetization of politics. A greater number of youths successfully secured elective positions nationwide in the 2023 general election. It is crucial that, as a developing democracy, Nigeria's political recruitment process becomes more deliberate and guided by political will to establish a roadmap for political development. The system must incorporate principles of equity, inclusiveness, and fairness.

In light of the study's findings, it is recommended that the National Assembly promptly pass the Too Old To Run Law, limiting elderly individuals who may be physically unfit from running for political offices in Nigeria. This initiative aims to pave the way for energetic and capable young individuals to participate in political positions nationwide, thereby expanding the scope of youth political inclusivity. Additionally, the enactment of an independent candidature bill is espoused to complement the objectives of the Not Too Young To Run Law and foster fair competition among political aspirants, disregarding the undue influence and obligations tied to political parties. The nomination and expression of interest forms should be made freely available to aspiring youths. This measure aims to discourage party godfathers and wealthy individuals from manipulating the process of selecting a party's candidate. Finally, youths should actively participate in the power structures of political parties and run for internal party positions to exert influence and advocate for decisions that favour aspiring youth within their respective parties.

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