

Youths and Sustaining Democracy in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract The crux of democracy is dependent on the desires of the population which such government serves. The Youths have been identified as an essential section of any country's population because of their contribution to economic and democratic development. In the case of Nigeria, youths have participated in politics, engineer agitation for environmental protection, electoral process and civil justice which constitute aspects of the democratic experience. However, in recent times the democratic experience in the country has been threatened by violence and insecurity which have been perpetuated by youths. This study is therefore informed by the need to analyse the challenges faced in sustaining democracy in Nigeria, the impact youths have on the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria as well as solutions that can be adopted to sustain democracy in the country. The study employs a survey design approach using a structured questionnaire titled "Impact and Challenges of Youths in Sustaining Democracy" (ICYSD) for data collection and was guided by three research questions. A total of 200 youths residing in Cross river state were sampled from 1200 youths in the Niger delta region. Data was analysed employing frequencies and percentages. The findings indicates that the primary challenge faced in sustaining democracy is illiteracy, ethnic sentiment, unemployment, poverty amongst others and that the impact of youths on the sustenance of democracy include manpower provision, voter strength, electoral violence and disruption of economic activities to mention a few. This study further reveals that through empowerment programmes, access to education, religious and ethnic tolerance and job creation, democracy can be sustained in Nigeria.

Keywords: *democracy, youths, sustenance*

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1. Introduction

Every country operates a system of governance, governance refers to the manner the country is governed. Scholars have identified Monarchy, Democracy, Oligarchy, Autocracy and Theocracy, as systems of governance that have been operated across the world. In recent times however, democracy has become a house hold name across the world and is increasingly being adopted by more countries across the world as such, making it one of the most commonly employed systems of governance [1]. Although the practice of democracy varies from one country to another, democracy bases its foundation on ensuring that the rights of citizens are protected while developing and running the affairs of the country through popular vote. Democracy can therefore be defined as governance that is chosen by the people for the people through an electoral procedure [2]. This implies that the democracy that is practiced in Ireland varies from that practiced in United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia to mention but a few. Throwing more light on

democracy, scholars have highlighted that it is culled from the Greek language and refers to "rule by simple majority". Hence, it can be defined as the ruling of a society through an electoral process that ensures that the freedom of citizens to associate with a view to actualizing their ideals and defend and advance their interest [3]. As such principally, the task of any society is to rebuild and revitalize itself while building its own abilities, educating and mobilizing its citizens [4] which include youths, mid-aged and elderly and they must therefore continue to allow themselves be educated and mobilized if the true values of democracy are to be sustained through consolidation and deepening of equity, in the fabrics of any society.

1.1. Youths

Youths can be defined as anybody between the ages of 18 and 30 [5]. In present projections of populations, it is estimated that over one billion of the world population are youths [6]. They are the owners and leaders of tomorrow [7] Scholars have continued to buttress the importance of youths to economic and political development [8]. According to Kura [6] in the past, people were not trusting

of the abilities of youths. This created a barrier for youths to surmount in order to attain their true potentials. However, in spite of their distrust and challenges, the contributions of the youths to societal development have continued to increase. Anasi [9] postulates that their creative abilities, labour power and orientation define the level, security and pace of development of a country.

According to Arubayi [10] they are potentially and are essentially the necessary resources worthy of investment by any nation and as such they are at the center of sustainable development of any country and any country that truly seeks to achieve meaningful national development must harness the potentials of the youths. In Nigeria, according to National population commission cited in Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe [11], it is estimated that the population of the youths is over 140 million. Their demographical significance in the Nigerian context make them valuable contributors as partners, stakeholders, organisers, entrepreneurs as well as strategic catalyst for national advancement.

In the political scene, going by the age bracket that youths are classified, they represent a significant percentage of the electorates. According to Anasi [9] they out-number the aged and the middle-aged in the society. As such, their role in the electoral process cannot be over emphasized. Khasan [12] postulates that they are the mobilizers of political revolutions and changes and this has seen them in developed countries take up political appointments. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister of Ireland; Leo Varadkar, Sebastian Kurz foreign minister and former President of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe and many more are typical examples where youths have embraced politics and empowerment. However, proponents have highlighted the cynicism usually associated with youths regarding politics [9]. This has subsequently affected their attitude towards existing political and organizational settings thereby affecting their participation in politics [7]. In developing countries this experience is even worsened by unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, poverty and corruption. These conditions can be particularly seen in the Nigerian democratic system.

1.2. Democracy in Nigeria

Nigeria, situated in the western part of the African continent is the most populous country in Africa with more than 150 million inhabitants [13]. The Nigerian democratic experience is a peculiar one. Once described as one of the strongholds of military dictatorship in Africa, the country has become an exemplary figure of the democratic practice in the African continent [1,14].

Prior to the military interruption of the democratic system of government, the country gained its political independence in 1960 under a democratic parliamentary system which has since evolved into presidential system of democracy that has produced four republics spanning several years. The cultural diversity of the Nigerian population has presented distinctive socio-political challenges for the country's political scene and has seen nepotism; ethnicity, tribalism and corruption gear its ugly head in a country with over 350 distinct ethnic groups.

These sentiments has been passed down across generations and has seen youths easily swayed into violence as a result of misgivings towards another tribe

that have been stirred by political and religious figures. As a result of this the country is constantly faced with fear of ethnic and religious clashes, insecurity posed by unemployed youths, protest by youths, terrorist attacks, militancy activities such as oil pipeline explosions and kidnapping by youths to mention a few.

2. Statement of the Problem

History records that the efforts of the youths in the emancipation of Nigeria from colonial rule and the continued sustenance of democracy cannot be overlooked. According to Chika & Onyene [15] the participation of youths in the democratic process in Nigeria can be traced back to 1920s when Nigerian youths started establishing local newspapers such as the "Lagos Daily Newspaper" by Herbert Macaulay and the "Nigerian Daily Times" by Richard Barrow and Adeyemo Alakija in 1925 and 1926 respectively. These newspapers were instrumental in raising the consciousness of the Nigerian youths and in 1934, a political party known as Nigerian National Democratic Party was floated by Herbert Macaulay [13] and ever since politically oriented groups such as the Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF), TIV Youth Organization (TYO), Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) to mention a few have continued to raise and agitate for issues that affect the political landscape of the nation. These agitations have led to the passage of the not too young to run bill by the House of Assembly with a view to encouraging youth participation in governance. The nascent democratic process in Nigeria is however, not without its challenges, there is still widespread electoral subversion, political violence and ethnic related agitation in the country that are perpetuated by youths under the instructions of political leaders and elders [1]. As such, using the youths as weapons against the growth of democracy in the country.

The recently held presidential election in 2019 supports this proposition and saw wide spread cases of political violence and ethnic related agitation across the country prior to the elections by youths. These actions further threaten the sustenance of democracy in the country and must be tackled if the country is to experience true democratic dividends and national growth. This paper therefore, seeks to analyse the role of youths in sustaining democracy in Nigeria.

3. Study Objectives

The purpose of this research is the following objectives were addressed:

1. To ascertain the challenges of sustaining democracy in Nigeria.
2. To determine the impact of youths on sustaining democracy in Nigeria.
3. Proffer solutions to sustaining democracy in Nigeria.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the challenges of sustaining democracy in Nigeria?

2. What role do youth have on sustaining democracy in Nigeria?
3. What efforts are necessary for sustaining democracy in Nigeria?

5. Methodology

The study adopts a survey design approach that sought the opinions of youths across the Niger-Delta region

(I) Scope of the study

The study was carried out in the Niger Delta region which comprises of Abia, Delta, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Imo, Ondo and Edo states. The study purposely selected youths residing in Cross Rivers State because of its level of socio-economic development as well as the population of youths residing in this state. The study focused on youths residing in Calabar town that were from each of the 36 states in the country.

(II) Study Population

The population for the study is made up of students, corps members, workers. In order to capture every geo-political zone, two hundred participants were selected from the population employing stratified sampling technique and random sampling was employed to get the participants that took part in the research.

(III) Sample of the Study

For the purpose of the study, a sample size of two hundred respondents was drawn up from the population comprising 114 males and 86 females aged between 20 to 30 years.

(IV) Instrumentation

The research instrument was titled “Impact and Challenges of Youths in Sustaining Democracy” (ICYSD) questionnaire fashioned for data collation and to allow participants state their opinions about these issues. The instrument was divided into four sections titled “A-D”. Section “A” addressed the bio data of the participants, while sections “C-D” addressed the opinion of respondents on the impact and challenges of youths in sustaining democracy in Nigeria by asking three open-ended questions.

(V) Data Analysis

The data collated and recorded for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency and percentages.

6. Results and Analysis

Upon analysis of the data collected the following results were obtained as presented below:

Table 1. Bio-data of Respondents

Variable		F	%
Sex	Male	114	57.00
	Female	86	43.00
Age	20-25 years	106	53.00
	26-30 years	94	47.00
Geographical Zone	North Central	22	11.00
	South West	40	20.00
	North East	30	15.00
	South South	20	10.00
	North West	44	22.00
	South East	44	22.00
Total		200	100.00

Research Question 1: What are the challenges of sustaining democracy in Nigeria?

Table 2. Scores by percentage of challenges of sustaining democracy in Nigeria in ranking order

S/N	ITEMS	N	F	%
1	Illiteracy	200	120	60
2	Ethnic sentiments	200	108	54
3	Unemployment	200	108	54
4	Environmental degradation	200	104	52
5	Poverty	200	100	50
6	Insecurity	200	70	35
7	Bad Governance	200	62	31
8	Religious sentiments	200	58	29
9	Gender Bias	200	56	28
10	Corruption	200	46	23
11	Drug/alcohol abuse	200	4	21
12	Educational access	200	40	21
13	Over population	200	40	20
14	Desperate political leaders	200	34	17
15	False teaching in place of worship	200	28	12
16	Marginalization	200	26	14
17	Cult activities	200	24	13

The table above (Table 2) indicates the score by percentage of challenges to sustaining democracy in ranking order and establishes that illiteracy is the most common and prominent among these challenge with a percentage of 60% followed by ethnic sentiments (54%). From the table (Table 2) it can be deduced that the least identified challenge to sustaining democracy in Nigeria is Cult activities (12%).

Research Question 2: What impact do youth have on sustaining democracy in Nigeria?

Table 3. Percentage score or impact of youth on sustaining democracy in ranking order

S/No	ITEM	N	F	%
1	Labour force	200	124	62
2	Mobilizers	200	118	59
3	Voting strength	200	88	44
4	Resource control Agitations	200	74	37
5	Insecurity	200	68	34
6	Civic Unrest	200	66	33
7	Disrupt economic activities	200	26	13
8	Electoral violence	200	36	18
9	Vote Selling/buying	200	34	17
10	Discourage foreign investment	200	28	14
11	Impact national development	200	28	14
12	Create religious crisis	200	26	13
13	Escalate unemployment	200	26	13

The table above (Table 3) establishes that the commonest impact of youths in sustaining democracy in Nigeria is their contribution to the labour force with 62% and their ability to mobilize other citizens for the electoral process. While the least scored is their impact in escalating unemployment in the country (13%) as an impact on sustaining democracy.

Research Question 3: What efforts are necessary for sustaining democracy in Nigeria?

Table 4. Percentage score or effort necessary for sustaining democracy in ranking order

S/No	ITEMS	N	F	%
1	Empowerment programme for youths	200	108	56
2	Corrupt free administrations	200	106	52
3	Ensuring access for citizens to education	200	104	52
4	Ensuring employment opportunities	200	103	52
5	Functioning Judicial system	200	76	38
6	Provision of basic social amenities	200	70	34
7	Advocating religious tolerance	200	42	22
8	Press Freedom	200	40	20
9	Training/ equipping of Security agents	200	40	20
10	Violence free elections	200	38	19
11	Free and fair elections	200	36	18
12	Advocating ethnic tolerance	200	32	16.5
13	Functioning anti-corruption agencies	200	30	15
14	Good governance measures	200	30	15
15	Enlightenment campaigns for youths	200	26	13

The table above (Table 4) establishes that organizing empowerment programmes for youths will immensely affect the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria (56%) and enlightenment campaigns for youths was highlighted as having the least impact on sustenance of democracy (13%)

7. Discussion of Findings

Research Question one

The study establishes that illiteracy, ethnic sentiments, unemployment, poverty, bad governance, gender bias among others are challenges in sustaining democracy in Nigeria. This opinion is supported by the studies of various scholars who highlight that a significant amount of Nigerian youths fail to enroll in schools annually [16]. This therefore agrees with the identification by the study that illiteracy significantly challenges the sustenance of democracy as it instigates ethnic sentiments, increase unemployment amongst others. This argument agrees with the proposition by Chukwuemeka & Aghara [17] who highlight that due to marginalization, denial of social rights and environmental degradation have continued to threaten the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria through agitations. Furthermore, the studies of Elegbeleye [18] is in agreement with the findings of the research question one and proposes that inadequate social amenities, corrupt administrations, unemployment and poor educational standards have posed dangers to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. As such it can deduced that the challenges of sustaining democracy in Nigeria is multifaceted in nature and hence must be tackled employing a multidimensional approach.

Research Question Two

The study establishes that the youths through their activities as labour force, mobilizers for elections, voting strength, agitations for resource control, insecurity (Kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery), electoral violence and disrupting economic activities (pipe line vandalism) amongst others impact the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the assertion by

Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe [11] who opines that youths are instrumental in the growth of any economy because of their benefit to the labour force and electoral strength. Furthermore, Okafor [19] posits that the participation of youths in crime threatens the stability of Nigeria's nascent democracy because of the impact it has on foreign investment, employment and national development.

Research Question Three

The study identified empowerment programmes, access to education, employment opportunities and religious tolerance amongst others as measures that can be employed to sustain democracy in Nigeria. These findings by research question one are in agreement with the proposition by Mutiba [20] who asserts that "education is the primary conduit for value formation". In addition, Awogbenle & Iwuamadi [21] highlights that empowerment of its populace is essential tool for the societal and national development of any country.

8. Conclusion

This paper has sort to critically analyse the impact of youths on sustaining democracy in Nigeria. Emphasis was placed on the youth because of the economical and electoral value youths play in the society. The study has established that youths affect the investment opportunities, security, pace of development and electoral system of any country. These political and religious leaders have sort to exploit for their benefit which has consequential implications for the sustenance of democracy. This consequently led to these questions been asked to determine the challenges faced in sustaining democracy, the impact of youths on the sustenance of democracy in the country and the solutions that can be employed to sustain democracy in the country.

The findings from these questions indicate that:

- Illiteracy, ethnic sentiments, unemployment, poverty, bad governance, gender bias among others challenges the sustenance democracy in Nigeria.
- Youths through their activities as labour force, mobilizers for elections, voting strength, agitations for resource control, insecurity (Kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery), electoral violence and disrupting economic activities (pipe line vandalism) amongst others impact the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.
- Empowerment programmes, access to education, employment opportunities and religious tolerance amongst others as measures that can be employed to sustain democracy in Nigeria.

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