UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE NIGERIA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ONYEWUCHI CHINEDU ONYENACHI

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE NIGERIA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

By

ONYEWUCHI CHINEDU ONYENACHI

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

April 2018
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved parents, Mr. Nathaniel Okechukwu Onyewuchi [and Mrs. Rita Adaure Onyewuchi. My siblings: Ijeoma, Nkeiru, Nnaemeka, Chibuike, Chukwueke and my husband, Nsini for their unflinching support throughout my studies.
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE NIGERIA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

By

ONYEWUCHI CHINEDU ONYENACHI

April 2018

Chairman : Professor Zaid Ahmad, PhD
Faculty : Human Ecology

This study intends to explore youth political participation in Nigeria through the National Assembly and the obstacles that limits them from fully participating in the political processes of the nation. Specifically, it explores four research questions: How do you appraise the level of youth political participation and their awareness of politics in the country? What are the obstacles to youth political participation in the National Assembly? How can youth participation in the national parliament be improved upon? How can an effective model for youth political participation be established? Qualitative research approach using case-study method from a critical research perspective was used for this study. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, observations and archival records. The interviews were conducted with 11 key informants across three categories of participants. The findings revealed that there is low youth political participation in the country. Their voices are largely silent in party politics and decision making. They are also challenged by their socioeconomic status, godfather issues, expensive nomination tickets, all which affects youth participation. Hence, the study recommends an elimination of these barriers and the adoption of an effective model of political participation for equitable representation of the Nigerian youth through active participation in the National Assembly and in politics generally.

Keywords : Participation, Youth, Politics, National Assembly, Constitution, Nigeria
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

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April 2018

Pengerusi : Profesor Zaid Ahmad, PhD
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Kata kunci : Penglibatan, Belia, Politik, Perhimpunan Nasional, Perlembagaan, Nigeria
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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 10 April 2018 to conduct the final examination of Onyewuchi Chinedu Onyenachi on her thesis entitled "Political Participation of Youth in the Nigerian National Assembly" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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<tr>
<td>ASUU</td>
<td>Academic Staff Union of Universities</td>
</tr>
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<td>CAPASSE</td>
<td>Cognitive Aspect of Political Awareness in Social Study Education</td>
</tr>
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<td>CMHA</td>
<td>Canadian Mental Health Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>HND</td>
<td>Higher National Diploma</td>
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<td>INEC</td>
<td>Independent National Electoral Commission</td>
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<td>NASS</td>
<td>National Assembly</td>
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<td>NANS</td>
<td>National Association of Nigerian Students</td>
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<td>NBA</td>
<td>Nigerian Bar Association</td>
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<td>NBS</td>
<td>National Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>NPC</td>
<td>National Population Commission</td>
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<td>NWNA</td>
<td>No Woman Need Apply</td>
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<td>NYM</td>
<td>Nigerian Youth Movement</td>
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<td>NYP</td>
<td>Nigerian Youth Parliament</td>
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<td>TYD</td>
<td>Thailand Youth Development Act</td>
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<td>YDP</td>
<td>Youth Development Plan</td>
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<td>UNHDR</td>
<td>United Nations Human Development Report</td>
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<td>YIAGA</td>
<td>Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The importance of active youth participation in politics for the building of strong democracy has been the subject of much debate amongst scholars and policymakers in both developed and developing countries in recent years (Forbrig, 2005a, 2005b; Iyengar & Jackman, 2004; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Sloam, 2007). Surveys such as that conducted by the UNDP (2013), have shown that a fifth of the world’s population is made up of predominantly young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years old. However, despite the overwhelming global youth population, scholars have observed that there is a decline and apathy in young people participation in electoral processes, party membership and governance particularly in established democracies (Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005; Henn, Weinstein, & Wring, 2002; D. Marsh, O'Toole, & Jones, 2006; Sloam, 2007, 2008, 2011). While these youth are often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, they are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments and many of them do not participate in elections (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004; UNDP, 2013).

This apathy towards politics has led to many researches in the last decade by different political analysts to understand this social phenomenon (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Mair & Van Biezen, 2001; D. Marsh et al., 2006; Norris, 2002; Stoker, 2006; Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005). In most cases, it was revealed that disillusioned by the adults’ long term political culture of ignoring them (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006), the sit-tight attitude of politicians and lack of adequate funding to play in the political arena, the youths shun formal politics (Adichie, 2011).

These findings from many predominantly quantitative studies of youth political participation, have however been negated in recent studies. As contrary to earlier researches in this area, it has been found that youth are not apolitical as previously thought, instead they are really interested in political matters, and do support the democratic process (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; Sloam, 2007; Youniss et al., 2002). However, they feel a sense of anti-climax having voted for the first time, and are critical of those who have been elected to positions of political power (Henn et al., 2002), mostly because their voices are not heard, as such they feel disenfranchised from the political process (Harris et al., 2010) particularly, as their votes do not count (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006). Based on this, the youth are opting more for the unconventional mode of participation rather than the known traditional mode.

This trend is not limited to western world or developed countries as researches in Nigeria on youth political participation has validated the fact that, despite the provision in the Nigerian Constitution giving youth the ample opportunity to vie for
elective post into the highest decision making arm of government – the Nigeria National Assembly (NASS), the reality on ground is different. Investigations have shown low participation of Nigerian youth in this arena with the sector being dominated largely by older men and women of an average age of between 45 to over 70 years (INEC, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015; NASS, 2007 2011 2015). The 70 million youth populations (NBS, 2012) are not given adequate representation in the decision making and leadership of the country. Many are deterred by the bottlenecks like access to fund, issues of godfathers or patron-client relationship (Animasawun, 2013; Collier, 2010; Onwudiwe, Kew, & Sklar, 2006) and exorbitant party nomination cards used as criteria to vie for elective posts (Avosuahi, 2014; Gaskia, 2014). Politics in Nigeria being an elitist game (Nolutshungu, 1990; Omodia, 2010), it takes those in the high income bracket and sometimes those with high education to play real politics in the country. The hegemonic hold of some powerful people in the society on electoral matters and elective posts have also placed a stranglehold on political interference and barred the youth from active political participation which has led to the retrogressing participation of Nigerian youth in politics. As Adichie (2011) pointed out, despite the fact that about 70% of Nigeria's population is under 35 years, spanning over a period of time, there is has been a political culture of ignoring the youth, who themselves feel disconnected from the political process. Therefore, like the post-communist democracies and established democracies in which youths tend to distance themselves from traditional forms of political participation due to the fact that they feel alienated from formal decision making (Forbrig, 2005a; O'Donoghue et al., 2002), same rule applies to the Nigerian youths. There is this general belief that their votes do not count and so many shun active political participation. However, tired of long years of misrule, bad leadership, mismanagement of the economy, endemic corruption, poverty, inadequate educational facilities, poor health care, unfulfilled electoral promises; Nigerian youth are coming out of their shell and becoming sensitive to political participation and the need for their voices to be heard through representation in elective posts. Recent studies have shown that more youths are participating in politics and going a step further by actually vying for elective posts. In a sense one can say, there is a new awakening, a reborn of political interest and participation in the minds of the Nigerian youth.

Nevertheless, a growing awareness of political processes notwithstanding, the number of youth in active political institutions such as parliament remains relatively small and even smaller is the youth actually given the mandate by their various parties to contest for elections. Varied reasons ranging from incompetence on the part of the youth, lack of political know-how, and lack of adequate fund to the inability to adequately represent the people have been ascribed to this. It is this small number of full-time politically active youth that interests the researcher, because there is the distinct possibility that this group will continue to grow in numbers if given the right incentives and enabling laws to participate fully in governance. Currently, although the three major political parties in the country: PDP, APC, APGA have well-developed youth wings, these are more or less like ceremonial
offices as they are not really allowed to play prominent roles in elections. To a large extent, youth are deterred to participate fully in politics due to exorbitant cost of nomination tickets, issue of ‘god fatherism’ (Adeoye, 2009; Olarinmoye, 2008; Omotola, 2007), ethnicity (Joseph, 2014; Beshiru Salawu, 2010; B Salawu & Hassan, 2011), inadequate education among others. And by inadequate education here means that youth are not properly tutored on political knowledge and leadership qualities.

Since the transition to democracy in 1999, the number of youth in the National Assembly (parliament) and even the state assemblies has not shown any significant improvement. In contrast to the 1999 elections of which 58 thousand Nigerian youth were registered to vote, the number rose by only 5 per cent to 61 thousand voters for the 2003 elections, and by 6.3 per cent to 62 thousand voters for the 2007 general elections (INEC, 2010). While some of these political parties have improved their youth party wings by actually having offices for them and appointing heads to run them, the supposed heads are really not youth themselves considering their ages (Ibeh, 2014; Ukaibe, 2015). This fact became more evident post Nigeria general elections and appointment of ministers. The ministerial list had 21 nominees which consist of three women, four former senators and five former governors with an average age of 53, which is clearly outside the purview of the legal youth bracket of 18-40 years (Ukaibe, 2015). No youth was appointed or made it into the politically appointed posts despite the huge support they gave to the present government which led to its winning the election.

The central goal of this thesis therefore, is to explore through qualitative research approach using case study method from a critical research perspective, the obstacles that inhibits full-time politically active youth from seeking elective posts in the national parliament and being part of the decision making process in government. The researcher is interested in how the youth wing of political parties are structured along party lines, the mechanisms (which includes the laws/constitution), such that the interests of the youth are preserved, empowered and given the necessary leverage to participate in decision making. This investigation and analysis of the underlying socioeconomic, political eco-system and cultural causes of the problem is designed to result in action to address the problem of low youth participation in the national parliament of the country comprising of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Whilst a number of quantitative research studies have looked at the low participation of youth in politics particularly in developed countries (Forbrig, 2005b; Henn & Foard, 2013; Henn et al., 2005; Henn et al., 2002; D. Marsh et al., 2006; Sloam, 2007), this research intends however to focus primarily on politically active Nigerian youth who are members of political parties using qualitative approach. Although some research has been carried out on youth participation in politics in the country, so far there have been few empirical investigations into the hindrances politically active youth in Nigeria face in seeking political posts into the national parliament.
This study will fill this gap. Despite the low levels of youth political involvement in elective posts, it is also necessary to explore approaches toward identifying and mitigating bottlenecks that hamper youth participation in decision-making platforms at local, regional and national levels. The local and state parliaments are outside the scope of the study but the findings from this study can be replicated on both platforms since they operate with same constitution. Youth already involved in politics should be empowered and encouraged to work effectively within political parties, political institutions and to engage in political processes by giving competent and capable youth who can run for political offices the opportunity to do so. The study will allow for analysis around: political participation and trust in political institutions in the country. These findings will provide important background for identifying national-level entry points for engaging young people in democratic governance activities as well as add to the existing body of knowledge on this issue.

The purpose of this study therefore is to explore the constraints and bottlenecks that prevent already politically active youth from being given the opportunity to vie for elective positions through nomination by their parties into the National Parliament. And based on this, recommendations will be made on ways to tackle the issues for equitable representation of the Nigerian youth in governance.

The introductory chapter of this study will discuss the Historical Background on youth political participation in Nigeria, the Problem Statement, Objectives of the Study with emphasis on the General Objectives and Specific Objectives, Significance of the Study, Scope and Limitations of the Study, Participatory Democratic Theory, Conceptual Definition of Terms and the Summary.

1.1 Historical Background

Statistics from the National Baseline Youth Survey (2012) estimate the population of Nigerian youth (15 – 35 years) to be 64 million where female population are 51.6 percent and male 48.4 percent of the population. In spite of this data, youth are often excluded from national and international decision-making structures that affect them (NBS, 2012).

Table 1.1 : Percentage Distribution of Youth (18-35) by Age Group and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth participation also called youth involvement, has been used by government agencies, researchers, educators, politicians and others to define, examine and explore the active engagement of young people in government, community development and economic activity (Forbrig, 2005a; Henn & Foard, 2013; Henn et al., 2005; Henn et al., 2002; Iyengar & Jackman, 2004; Kovacheva, 2005; D. Marsh et al., 2006; O'Donoghue et al., 2002; Sloam, 2007).

In 1975, the National Commission on Resources for Youth in the United States defined youth participation as the involvement of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequences is extended to others – that is, outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. Other desirable features of youth participation are provision for critical reflection on the participatory activity and the opportunity for group effort toward a common goal. Conversely in 1995, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) established a definition of meaningful youth participation as: “meaningful youth participation involves recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for youth to become involved in decision that affect them at individual and systemic levels.”

All over the world, liberalization from tyrant leaders and oppressive laws have been fought against by mostly youth leaders. A case in point is the Arab youth uprising in 2011 which revolutionized the political scenery in that region. The youth in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya frustrated by long years of authoritarian rule, poverty, political suppression, economic mismanagement, unemployment, social injustices among others fought back against their oppressors (Babatunde, 2015; Robbins, 2017). Another example is the Hong Kong youth mass pro-democracy sit-ins in 2014 called the ‘Umbrella Revolution’. The youth were protesting for more political freedom and full democracy. They demanded for the right to nominate and pick their own head of the Hong Kong government without interference from the Chinese Communist Party (Kaiman, 2014; Ortmann, 2015). Nigeria is no exception. Nigeria’s liberation struggle from colonialism to gaining independence was championed by the heroic acts of Dr. Herbert Macaulay, Ernest Ikoli, Chief H O Davis, J C Vaughan, Oba Samuel Akinsanya, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa, and Obafemi Awolowo among others who were at their youthful age during that period. This feat was aided in no small measure by the formation of the first national party the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934 founded by J.C. Vaughn, Ernest Ikoli, H.O. Davies, and Samuel Akinsanya. The NYM primary objectives among other things were to strive for national unity and kick against tribal and ethnic discrimination among the tribes in Nigeria. The efforts of these youths led to Nigeria’s independence in 1960 and paved way for democracy in the country in the 80s and 90s. As the (NBS, 2012) elucidated, young people have been in the forefront of good governance and fight for credible leadership in the country since the restoration of democracy.
Women participation in politics has also not been at par with that of their male counterparts as evidenced by the number of women in politics and the positions they occupy in governance. Nwogu and Wariboko (2015, p.2) citing (Eyinade, 2010) observes that, “in Nigeria, politics is presumed to be a man’s turf, where No Woman Need Apply (NWNA) – an unspoken slogan reminiscent of the discrimination against Irish nationals in 19th century Britain.”

The discovery of oil popularly known as the ‘oil boom’ days saw most of the leaders more interested in accumulating wealth than in nation building. The enormous money coming in from the oil sector did not match the social and economic development of the country. In spite of the oil discovery, over 70 percent of Nigerians lived on less than a dollar a day, 43 percent lack sanitation and clean water, and mortality rate is among the highest in the world, (Gary & Karl, 2003). The oil boom days in Nigeria herald the entrance of corruption and waste into the country leading to long run of poor economic performance (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003). The Dutch disease which reared its head from the 1974 to 1982 saw the decline in agriculture, the main means of export and sustenance to the country. This led to the drop in oil prices in 1982, while the country witnessed rise in inflation, debt and the dwindling of foreign exchange (Pinto, 1987).

Faced with unemployment, poor education, inadequate health facilities, lack of affordable housing, poverty etcetera, youth participation in political institutions, electoral processes, party membership and decision making dwindled and has impacted on nation building and political transformation of Nigeria. The unending crises and deprivation of political participation of youths in Nigeria since 1999 is a major test on its democracy, as all efforts to ensure that youths are given their right place in the political dispensation has proved abortive (Adichie, 2011; Uhunmwuangho & Urhoghide, 2013).

Nigeria has deep-seated political issues fuelled majorly by clever and elite politicians who use religious bigotry, illiteracy, tribal sentiments, and unemployment to further divide the country along ethnic lines, thereby maintaining their stranglehold on power (Hunwick, 1992; Joseph, 2014; Olarinmoye, 2008; Omotola, 2009; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Beshiru Salawu, 2010; B Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Youth easily influenced due to poverty, lack of education, inexperience and unemployment, are coerced through money and other incentives to act as political thugs to these politicians. Furthermore, some politicians became tyrannical and form youth gangs and killer squad against their perceived rivals or opposition (Adeoye, 2009; Agba, Coker, & Ogaboh, 2010).

Some scholars hold the belief that the lack of political ideologies or political will to fall back on as a motivational force in politics and governance is behind dearth of youth participation in politics (Joseph, 2014; Omotola, 2009; Beshiru Salawu, 2010). Overtime, majority of the people have come to rely less and less on transparency during elections. Questions like why participate in politics when their votes are not
counted? The candidate of their choice not allowed to emerge or their opinions taken into considerations? Leaders are more or less imposed on the people through selection, rigging, insider dealings, international politicking and hegemonic group. The 2015 General elections which held so much promise for the youth inclusion in decision making, sadly ended with no noticeable appreciation of the number of youth in elective posts (Abimboye, 2015; Lunn & Harari, 2014). Once more, the youth voices will not be heard and decisions will be made on their behalves. These are all the challenges that the youth have to battle with and win to be included in politically transforming the country.

Recently however, there has been an awakening of the youth interest in politics in the country, with the youth increasingly coming out from the shadows to join mainstream politics. Through advocacy groups like the Spaces for Change, G-49, Youth Ballot Evolution (YBE), and many others, youth seek representation in government, taxing government and various political parties for at least 30% youth inclusion in politics and decision-making (EU-OECD, 2014; Gbemisola, 2014; Metuh, 2014). In a century where youth are becoming more politically aware, it behooves various governments to garner this huge demographic bloc to play active role in the country’s politic arena and contribute to developmental issues.

It was based on dearth of youth in decision making and the negative use of their strength in politics that led to the launch of Nigeria Youth Parliament in August 25, 2008 by the late President Umaru Musa Ya’Adua with the singular objective of preparing Nigerian youth in decision making process while permitting them adequate representation in governance (Ayansina, 2015). The success and election of Mhairi Black, the 20-year-old Britain's youngest lawmaker during UK 2015 Elections is something that should be replicated across Africa and Nigeria in particular (McKirdy, 2015).

It is appalling and of grave concern that Nigeria blessed with huge natural and human resources cannot harness these advantages properly to the benefit of its citizens. With an overwhelming youth population, the scope and reach with what it can achieve in real terms is enormous. As such in keeping with the current world happenings of seeing more youth in high positions of authorities from Presidency, to Governorship, to Parliament, it is time for the Nigerian youth to be given the mantle of authority to contribute to nation building.

1.2 Nigeria Youth, Elections and Constitution

Despite the over 70 million youth population (NBS, 2012; NPC, 2017), statistics from the two most recent elections reveals that the trend of inequitable representation of youth in the highest legislative arm of government since the inception of democracy in the country has continued (INEC, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015; NASS, 2007 2011 2015). From the aforementioned statistics, in the 2011
General Elections, out of the 109 senate members, only one youth made it into the Senate and 11 youth out of 360 for this period made it into the House of Representatives. The 2015 General elections which held so much promise for the youth inclusion in politics following several agitations and campaigns by the youth for more inclusion in governance, sadly ended with no noticeable appreciation of the number of youth in elective posts.

The revised Nigerian National Youth Policy (2009) defines youth as males and females between 18 and 35 years. But for a more inclusive term particularly for elective posts, political parties in the country tend to describe youth as young persons between the ages of 18 and 40 years. The reason is not farfetched as the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Section 65, 106, 131 & 177) pegs the statutory age to contest for the post of President at 40 years (Section 131 (b); Governorship, 35 years (Section 177 (b); Senate 35 years (Section 65 (a); House of Representative 30 years (Section 65 (b); House of Assembly 30 years (Section 106 (b); for Local Government Chairman and Counsellorship, 30 and 25 years respectively. Going by the country’s political parties’ definition of youth, it means young people are eligible to contest for all elective posts in the country. However, in spite of this provision in both the country’s and political party’s constitutions, the number of youth in both the Senate and House of Representatives continues to be low. This begs the question on why youth participation in both chambers is on the periphery despite well-established youth wings in the political parties. Political party youth wings that are supposed to be nurtured and groomed to produce future leaders and political actors are often overlooked in preference for the older and more established politicians.

This fact was buttressed in the 2015 Youth Candidacy Report in General Election as published by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA). This independent report revealed that out of a total of 746 senatorial candidates nationwide, a total of 150 (20%) youth candidates between the ages of 25 and 40 years entered the contest. However, following the Nigeria Electoral Act (2003) guidelines, only 73 youth candidates who represent 10 percent of the total figure emerged. Further verification resulted in the disqualification of 27 young people representing four percent youth candidates; and this was based on age aggregate of 25 - 34 which fell outside the purview of the required constitutional age to contest for Senate. This left only 46 (six percent) youth aspirants who had just turned the acceptable age of 35years at the time of the election.

On the other hand, in same 2015 election, a total of 1774 House of Representatives’ candidates emerged nationwide, out of which 328(18%) youth candidates joined the race. While 285(16%) of them who cut across the six geo-political zones qualified to contest, 41(2.3%) candidates were dropped based on constitutional age which ranged between 20 and 29.
Table 1.2: Result of 2015 Nigeria General Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (2015)</th>
<th>Total Candidates (Adults/Youths)</th>
<th>Total No. of Youth (25-40 yrs) Contestants</th>
<th>Qualified to Contest (Youth)</th>
<th>Disqualified from Contest (Youth)</th>
<th>Won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senatorial Contest</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Representatives Contest</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author’s construct with figures from YIAGA, 2015 Youth Candidacy Report in General Election

The disparity between adult and youth contestants can be seen from the tables ‘Constitutional Youth Age of 18 – 35 years and ‘Political Parties Youth Age of 18 – 40 Years’, as a comparison of the constitutional youth age of 18 – 35 years and the political parties youth age of 18 – 40 years showed that zero percent youth made it into the 2011 Senate house as against one percent in 2015. While in 2011, less than 1.1 percent got elected into the lower house for the constitutional age and 12 percent for the political parties youth age. From the aforementioned, it can be verified that the numbers and percentage of youth at the highest levels of decision making have not shown any appreciable change and there are no noticeable sign that things will improve in the nearest future without requisite action from both party leaders and youth themselves. The challenges facing the youth ranging from education, political knowledge, party laws, and the deep-seated prejudice that the youth lack the ability to rule not having exhibited any leadership quality to engender such faith in their capabilities. As such, they cannot be trusted or given the mandate to participate in politics or be elected into the National Assembly (NASS).

Table 1.3: Constitutional Youth Age of 18 – 35 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NASS</th>
<th>Total No. of Members</th>
<th>No. of Youth (18 – 35yrs)</th>
<th>No. of Adults</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 (7th Assembly)</td>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>4.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (8th Assembly)</td>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author’s construct (Extracted from http://www.nassnig.org/mp/assembly/7 and http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=70)
Table 1.4 : Political Parties Youth Age of 18 – 40 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NASS</th>
<th>Total No. of Members</th>
<th>No. of Youth (18 – 40yrs)</th>
<th>No. of Adults</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 (7th Assembly)</td>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (8th Assembly)</td>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author’s construct (Extracted from http://www.nassnig.org/mp/assembly/7 and http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=70)

Footnote: Nigeria operates bicameral legislature; the Senate (Upper House) and House of Representatives (Lower House) established under section 4 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The Senate is made of 109 Senators, 3 each drawn from the 36 States of the Federation and 1 representing the Federal Capital Territory. House of Representative is composed of 360 members’ elected based on proportional representation of population of each of the 36 States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (NASS, 2015).

1.3 Definitions of a Youth

Encarta (2009) defines youth as a “time when somebody is young: the period of human life between childhood and maturity”. This somewhat vague description was however given more definitive boundary by the United Nations (1981; 1999; 2000), who for statistical purposes defined youth as a person between the ages of 15 and 24 years. It was however quick to point out that the designation of youth is subject to change from one country to another and from region to region based on parameters like changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. The Commonwealth (2013) on the other hand, classified youth as ages between 15 and 29 years.

Consequent on the Commonwealth definition of youth, in some of the Asian countries, China and the National Youth Policy of India (2014) youth were also designated as those aged 15 to 29. However, the National Youth Council Singapore defined youth as 15-35 years; in the Youth Law of Indonesia (2009) youth were classified as 16-30 year-olds; Thailand Youth Development Act (2007) and the Youth Development Plan (2012) pegged its own as 18-25 years. And for Malaysia, 1997 National Youth Development Policy defined youth as 15 to 40 years.
Meanwhile, in Africa, the African Youth Charter at its 17th Ordinary Session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government held in Banjul in the Gambia on August 2, 2006 defined youth or young people as persons between the ages of 15 – 35 years. Countries in Africa have however had to make their definitions on youth age based on individual differences and their own peculiarities. For countries like Uganda, its National Youth Council Statue 1993 defines a youth as between ages 18 and 30 years; Tanzania classified its own as between 15 and 35 years; and the National Youth Policy of South Africa (2009 – 2014) (Africa, 2009 - 2014), defines youth as any persons between the ages of 14 and 35 years.

Table 1.5 : Youth Age across the Globe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATION/COUNTRY</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>YOUTH AGE (Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth</td>
<td>Commonwealth (2013)</td>
<td>15 – 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>15 – 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>National Youth Policy of India (2014)</td>
<td>15 – 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>National Youth Council Singapore</td>
<td>15 - 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>the Youth Law of Indonesia (2009)</td>
<td>16-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Thailand Youth Development Act (2007) and the Youth Development Plan (2012)</td>
<td>18-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>African Youth Charter</td>
<td>15 – 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>National Youth Council Statue (1993)</td>
<td>18 – 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td></td>
<td>15 – 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Nigerian National Youth Policy</td>
<td>18 – 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author’s Construct
On its part, the Nigerian National Youth Policy, specified that the youth shall include all males and females aged 18 – 35 years, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This premise it argued was based on the late maturity of the Nigerian youth due to the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions of the society and “a time in life when most young people are going through dramatic changes in their life circumstances as they move from childhood to adulthood,” (NYP, 2009, Pg. 6). Nevertheless, political parties in the country in a broader definition of youth and to ensure more participation had extended the youth age. As noted in the constitution of the two prominent political parties in the Nigeria, the People’s Democratic Party, PDP and the All Progressive Party, APC they defined youth as young persons between the age of 18 and 40 years. Consequent on this and taking into consideration the social, cultural, psychological, demographic and economic state of the Nigerian youth, this study will adopt the parties’ definition of youth as persons between the ages of 18 to 40 years. This will allow for a clearer portray of the low representation of youth at the National Assembly despite provision for them at both the country and political parties constitution. And this therefore will form the base rock for subsequent discussion of youth political participation in the nation’s parliament in this thesis.

Table 1.6 : United Nations Document on Youth Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity/Instrument/ Organization</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO Statistics</td>
<td>Youth: 15-24</td>
<td>UN Instruments,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Habitat (Youth Fund) 21</td>
<td>Youth 15-32</td>
<td>Agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF /The Convention on Rights of the Child</td>
<td>Child until 18</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The African Youth Charter Union, 2006</td>
<td>Youth: 15-35</td>
<td>African</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 Problem Statement

The Nigerian National Assembly has been dominated for over 30 years since the return of democracy in 1999 by same cycle of former and old politicians with little or no youth participation in governance. These politicians fail to take into account the fact that for effective democracy, every strata of the society need to be involved in the decision making. Currently, youth involvement in the nation’s parliament is low averaging between zero and five percent (YIAGA, 2017). However, until the youth are given the opportunity to be fully involved in the decision making process particularly on issues that affect them, they will not be able to contribute their quota to nation building (Dike & Dike, 2017). Therefore, the obstacles that limits youth from fully participating in politics and seeking elective posts in the nation’s parliament should be tackled for inclusive governance.

The marginalization of the youth in the political process of Nigeria represents a significant lapse in its democratic set up (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016). Presently, the political scene is manned by the same sit-tight and money bag politicians who have taken over the political arena of the country and refused to allow politically active youth to contribute their quota to nation building by playing prominent roles in governance (Achebe, 1984; Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Gbemisola, 2014; Ukiwo, 2003; Wahiu, Lappin, & Khadiagala, 2017). Hence, the number of active youth in party membership, elective posts and particularly in national parliament has remained low. And even smaller are the youth actually given the mandate by their various parties to contest for elections (IDEA, 2016). Unfortunately, these recycled politicians have done little to nothing to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the country (Adichie, 2011; Gbemisola, 2014; Uimpanmwaungho & Urehgohide, 2013).

It was the low involvement of youth in decision making that prompted the late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua to inaugurate the Nigerian Youth Parliament (NYP), in August 25, 2008 shortly after his administration took over in 2007 (NYP, 2018). The central objective was to prepare the youth in decision making process while permitting them adequate representation in governance. Despite this laudable effort to engender more youth participation, the outcome of recent elections has shown that the goal of the NYP has not yielded the desired results. It is preposterous to note that from 2008 to date, the representation of youth in the national parliament has not risen to any appreciable level. This is attributable to the herculean obstacles that deter most youth to become actors in this arena (Adetula, 2015; Asaju, Arome, & Anyio, 2014; Stratmann, 2017). However, in order to attain the much desired goal of transforming the nation, Nigeria needs the participation of its youth in the highest decision making body of the nation to bring in the vibrancy, vigor, energy and drive needed to deal with the quagmire of recycled politician (Adegbami & Uche, 2016) and boost the socio-political development of the country (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016).
This cycle of non-inclusion as noted by some scholars can be attributable to the fact that the youth do not have a platform and a voice to move for change on issues that concern them (Meagher, 2014; Sloam, 2014). However, a lot of barriers to their participation do exist, such as legislative age which limits their opportunities to qualify for public office (NYP, 2009, Pg. 6; Stockemer & Sundström, 2018), godfather issues (Olaniyi, 2018; Osayi, 2015; Sule, Sani, & Mat, 2018), funding (Stratmann, 2017), political party structures to mention but a few.

Democracy has often been described as a game of numbers (Szpiro, 2010) and given that the youth have the numerical advantage, based on the (NBS, 2012; Onyekpe, 2007) report, this disenfranchisement speaks volume on the kind of participatory democracy being practiced in the country. Where youth are relegated to the background and adequate citizen participation in politics is jettisoned. Rather than become political actors, youth tend to be used more as political thugs and opposition tools during elections to rig and achieve the political goals of their godfathers after which they are quickly discarded (Agba, 2011; Agba et al., 2010). The alienation of the youth from active participation can be clearly seen in the way the country politics has evolved post-independence till date. Buttressing this, Adichie (2011) noted that politics in the country has been largely non-ideological from the military dictatorship era. Rather than focusing on ideas, politicians are more concerned with who will pump in the most money and acquire the most assets. Hence, gratifications are given in the form of cash to local leaders, bags of rice to women groups, and lots of promises made to win over the people. However, the study opined that with youth participation in politics, there will be more seriousness on the part of politicians.

Thus, it is only right that youth are made part of the decision making and become agents of change that will put in place policies that would address vital youth issues such as unemployment, access to qualitative education, adequate social facilities among other necessities (Enueme & Onyene, 2010; Gbemisola, 2014; Metuh, 2014). This fact is also buttressed by the international community which has recognized the importance of youth participation in politics and views it as a positive force for transformative social change (EU-OECD, 2014; UNDP, 2013). If the older politicians and by extension the political elite continue to ignore the youth, it will have adverse effect in the future as youth restiveness will escalate (Chikwe & Augustus-Daddie, 2018; Enueme & Onyene, 2010), the expected outcome of transforming the country will not be realized, and the cycle of corruption (Akanle & Adesina, 2015; Eke & Tonwe, 2016), wastage, poor infrastructure (Bello-Schünemann & Porter, 2017) will continue (Omotola, 2007, 2009). The Arab youth uprising should serve as a cautionary measure to the older politicians (Abdih, 2011; Filiu, 2011; Lynch, 2013).

Therefore a qualitative research study using case-study method from a critical research perspective (Merriam, 2002, 2009, 2014) was used to explore the bottlenecks that inhibit full-time politically active youth from seeking elective posts in the nation’s parliament and the challenges those that signify interest face in their
drive to become part of the decision making. Based on the information garnered, recommendations will be proffered that will become a working document on how these constraints can be eliminated and ensure more youth participation in politics.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do you appraise the level of youth political participation and their awareness of politics in the country?
2. What are the obstacles to youth political participation in the National Assembly?
3. How can youth participation in the national parliament be improved upon?
4. How can an effective model for youth political participation be established?

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The study objectives are:

1. To ascertain the level of youth political participation and awareness in Nigeria
2. To explore the constraints to active youth political participation in the National Assembly
3. To appraise processes to improve youth participation in the national parliament
4. To create a model for effective youth political participation

1.7 Significance of the Study

Currently, political participation in Nigeria is manned by the older people (Adibe, 2015; Gbemisola, 2014). The youth are relegated to the background and are lacking in elective posts where their voices will help tackle issues concerning youth as well as nation building. The national parliament as asserted by the country late President Musa Yar’Adua lacks adequate youth participation and representation in decision making; hence the establishment of the youth parliament in 2008. This above all is to absolve youth from manipulation by the older politicians, who use them only as political thugs. As the President emphasized, the participation of youth in the nation’s parliament, will bring in more depth to the political institutions and impact on the quality of democratic governance in the country.

This fact is buttressed in a study conducted by the United Nations in (2003; 2005; 2013; 2015) on Global Situation of Youth. From the study, it was shown that about 85 per cent youth live in developing countries with 60 per cent in Asia. The report further noted that the total population between 1980 and 1995 of young people has
dropped everywhere except in Africa. Politics being a game of number (Szpiro, 2010), this means that the high population of youth (Onyekpe, 2007) living in Africa should be empowered to participate in decision making for equitable representation of power; sadly this is not the case as what is obtainable is low representation in political participation.

Basically, the older politicians neglect the contribution of youth in decision making and nation building (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Forbrig, 2005b; O'Donoghue et al., 2002) this can have adverse effects on the polity in the long run if adequate steps are not taken to correct this phenomenon. The issue of low youth participation in politics in the country became very serious and critical in the build-up to the 2015 general elections and post-election. Just like the previous elections, despite all promises made prior to the elections, there was no equitable representation of the youth in the national parliament. And subsequent appointment of ministers by the Buhari-led government did not see any youth emerge. This is viewed by majority of the youth as a major setback to the nascent democracy and reneging on pre-election agreement. This led to the Youth Leader for the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC), Dasuki Jalo, blaming the president of failure to carry youth along in his administration thereby perpetuating the era of ‘use and dump’ of the youth in politics (Nwabughio, 2015).

The All Progressive Congress (APC), party which won the 2015 general election with massive support from the youth, had prior to the election promised a fair inclusion of youth in the administration. This is a party that fronts ‘Social Democracy Change’ as its ideology. In spite of this, the nation once more is witnessing the youth being ostracized from political involvement and being elected into political post of their choice and the sit-tight attitude of politicians which has led to the constant recycling of political leaders. The long promised pact to allow credible, capable youth was not realized. The youth with the numerical strength that should give them the necessary leverage to be adequately represented in governance, view this as social injustice. More so, youth known for their vibrancy, energy and radical approach to issues will bring in the needed impetus to transform the political scenery of the nation. Therefore, the difficulties to active youth participation in decision making at the highest echelon of governance need to be eliminated for effective and adequate representation of youth as well as the holistic transformation of the nation. This study as a result is geared to explore this gap and come up with practical solutions that will boost more youth participation in decision making.

The study will add more contributions to the existing body of knowledge in the academic sectors which can boost the awareness of the policy makers, political parties and youth for sustainable development and governance.

Finally, it is anticipated that this study will assist political parties, policy makers and successive governments in reviewing the existing laws/policies that limits youth political participation in the nation’s parliament.
1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is bounded in politically active Nigerian youth and it is focused on their participation in parliament. Specifically, it seeks to explore low youth participation in the Nigeria National Assembly with reference to political institutions, electoral processes, party membership and governance. Based on this, a qualitative empirical study will be carried out in order to identify the reasons behind low youth representation in the nation’s Senate and House of Representatives.

Although government has made effort to increase youth participation in parliament by creating a national youth parliament in 2008 (NYP, 2018), still this has not bridged the gap of getting more youth into the highest decision making arm of the country. The voices of the youth are still silent particularly on issues that affect them. Rather, the democratic setting is still being controlled by same cycle of former and old politicians who have done little to nothing to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the country (Adichie, 2011; Gbemisola, 2014; Uhunmwuangho & Urhoghide, 2013). Youth are relegated to the back burner in policy making and feel marginalized. As such there is need to assess the various constraints that limits politically active youth from participating in decision making and being part of transforming the nation polity.

In addition, the study will examine party policies in relation to political parties, the legislative age as laid out in the constitution and other relational issues that impact on youth participation in politics in the country. The study will center on youths who are active members of political parties. The reason being that this set of actors is better grounded in politics, having the requisite knowledge, education, drive and passion needed to play in this turf. Following this, youth from the youth wing of the country’s major political parties, party chieftains, academicians, youth political organizations, archival records and field observations will be used as study population.

However, potential constraints is envisaged in the area of resources, time and availability of the interviewees which may possibly hinder smooth process of data collection as they are located in different parts of the country. This will necessitate travelling all over the country to meet them and hold the interviews. Hence, the researcher will be constrained to work within the schedule of the interviewees which will impinge on duration of the study.

1.9 Conceptual Definition of Terms

**Political participation**: Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Brady (1995, Pg. 38) define political participation as “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”

**Political party**: Hofmeister and Grabow (2011, Pg. 11) citing (Downs, 1957) explains, “A political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election”.

### 1.10 Summary

Statistics indicates that youth make up a large share of the world’s population. Yet, despite this overwhelming global youth population, empirical evidence reveals a noticeable decline and apathy in young people participation in electoral processes, party membership and governance (Henn et al., 2005; Henn et al., 2002; D. Marsh et al., 2006; O’Neill, 2007; O’Toole, 2003; O’Toole; Lister, Marsh, Jones, & McDonagh, 2003; Quintelier, 2007; Sloam, 2007). While these youth are often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, they are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments and many of them do not participate in elections (UNDP, 2013).

In Nigeria particularly, with over 70 million youth population (NBS, 2012) about 90 percent of this group which make up two third majority of the population are not involved in decision-making and leadership of the country. Many are deterred by the bottlenecks like access to fund, unemployment (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2006; Zakaria, 2006), issues of godfathers and exorbitant party nomination cards used as criteria to vie for elective posts (Avosuahi, 2014; Gaskia, 2014). Growing awareness of political processes notwithstanding, the number of youth in active political institutions such as parliaments still remains relatively small and even smaller is the youth actually given the mandate by their various parties to contest for elections. It is this small number of full-time politically active youth that interests me, because there is the distinct possibility that this group will continue to grow in numbers if given the opportunity and enabling laws to participate fully in governance.

Currently, although the three major political parties in the country: PDP, APC, APGA have well-developed youth wings, these are more or less like ceremonial offices as they are not really allowed or well equipped to play prominent roles in decision making through vying for elective posts. Since the transition to democracy in 1999, the number of youth in elective posts has not shown any significant improvement. This is a serious predicament and setback to true democracy which is against ostracizing any group in the society from fully participating and becoming political actors. Thus, political parties must go beyond expressions of good will by
establishing youth wings and be proactive to address the non-inclusion of politically active youth in decision making.

The present situation in the country is that, the Nigerian political scene is manned by the same sit-tight and money bag politicians who have taken over the political scene and refused to allow politically active youth to contribute their quota to nation building by playing prominent roles in governance (Achebe, 1984; Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Ukiwo, 2003).

Youth political participation in decision making in Nigeria can be described as a critical evaluation of the reasons behind low number of youth in decision making in Nigeria. In this context, youth participation means involving the youth in decision-making processes on issues that affect them, as well as entrusting them with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to effectively and meaningfully participate in governance and nation building.

Based on this, the thesis objectives is to explore and understand through obtaining qualitative information from key informants, the obstacles to youth participation in decision making in Nigeria. The objectives of the thesis are: to explore the constraints to active youth political participation in politics, to evaluate factors that influence youth political participation and to appraise the perception of youth on politics. Basically, the major aim of this study is explore possible ways to tackle the issues associated with the low participation of politically active youth in politics and proffer the solutions to them at the end of the research.

To achieve this, a qualitative research approach is proposed for this study using case study method from a critical research perspective. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, focused group discussion, field notes from observations and archival records/documents. The interview data will be collected from three categories of informants that represent the bounded territory of the study area. They include national youth leaders, youth political organizations, youth contestants, party leaders and expert views.
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