Youths in Political Leadership in Nigeria: The Trend, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract
This work offers a glimpse into the world of youths in political leadership in Nigeria. Political leadership around the world, at present, is almost returning to what it used to be in the past. Youths, the world over, are gradually working their ways up towards taking the leadership mantle. This is very visible in the western world at present with Africa also trying to take a prompt from them. The work similarly gives a shortlist of some of such young world leaders who, regardless of all the ordeals and inflexibilities attached to attaining such heights in the world of politics, still maintain their stance. The Nigerian government and its initiatives to promote youths' involvement in governance and developmental structures, the challenges and prospects of youths' involvement in political leadership in Nigeria are equally captured in this study.
Keywords: youth, political, leadership, trends, challenges, prospects

Introduction
Youths the world over, display same characteristics that connote a sense of creativity, innovative, and are engine room for mobilization for economic, social and political development. A look at the political activities of the world undoubtedly showcases the extent to which youths are willing to take up the role of serving as agents of desirable changes in the political arena. There are celebrated cases of youths' involvement in political leadership positions the world over. There are cases of youths' involvement in leadership roles both in institutions of higher learning and the larger society but, the question of tackling the massive hindrances placed on their way to prominence has remained unanswered. The resultant effect being that, their involvement in the political leadership in Nigeria, will remain a tough struggle. Nigeria is a country with well over 180million people and with 60% being youths (below the age of 30). Aside representing this number of populace, Nigerian youths, at present, encounter challenges of different magnitude with regards to their involvement in attaining

political leadership; and the question of what their prospects are in Nigeria's political leadership would turn out to remain unanswered. Another question seeking answer is, how ready are the youths in taking up available political leadership positions in Nigeria?

Conceptualization of youth
The question of who truly is a youth has been ongoing for decades now. Definitions for this concept abound and on different occasions, it is positioned according to how it suits the "fluctuating political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances" of the country or individuals in question (United Nations General Assembly, 2001:2). In celebrating the International Youth Year in 1985, the United Nations General Assembly (2001:2) defined youth as "those persons between 15 and 24 years of age, without prejudice to other definitions of Member States." And this has been the yardstick used in measuring the age of a youth by the UN. Accordingly, as reasoned by the United Nations General Assembly (2001), when the Assembly by its resolution 50/81 of 14 December 1995, adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, it reiterated that, the United Nations defines youth as the age cohort 15-24. This has not been universally accepted, as countries depend on the situation of things around them to give their own definition for the term, youth.

According to Essayed (2018), the Commonwealth conceives the youth as 15-29 year old person while the African Youth Charter, seeking to resolve longstanding debates about defining youth within the African context and based on Africa's development realities, defines youth as any individual between 15-35 years of age. According to the Nigerian National Youth Policy (2009), youth is defined as one who is between the ages of 18-35. The idea of defining who truly is a youth has been an age-long struggle especially when it comes to indicating who gets involved in what. According to Agwuegbo and Justice (2018: 234)

> The various definitions of youth can be problematic when designing
> youth programs. There is no standard global definition. Africa and
> the global south have long insisted that youth is not a range of ages
> but defined by a diversity of culturally defined social processes that
> mark the transition from child to adult.

It is clear that the perception of who does/gets what is very well centered on what the generality of people believe is one's capacity. The society believes that your ability to get certain things done is centered on your age only and not your level of exposure and capacity. The prolonged period of dependency on their parents is not helping matters. UNDP (2012) in reiterating this, states that:

> Youth is often indicated as person between the age where he/she
> may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds
> his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing,

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> as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an
> independent household puts many young people into prolonged
> period of dependency.

And this is why Africans still have the problem of sit-tight leaders. If gone at last, another elderly person is meant to take over, thereby sidelining the youths, their levels of education, exposure, charismatic qualities and capacity notwithstanding. Youths are significant members of the society who are indispensable in building a strong democracy and in societal development. They are the future leaders who have significant roles to play to ensure sustainable democratic process, peace, and stability in the society (Bolaji, Manafa & Saba, 2015).

Conceptualizing leadership
Leadership is an inevitable activity of the human race. According to Peter and Ebimobowei (2015), "the art of leading others come from the art of leading oneself." What this clearly connotes is that, everyone has the capability to lead him/herself. Leadership entails a lot and there is no one way cut to defining it. Leadership, according to Alhayany (2018), is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement. It is inter-personal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals. Society today is getting more complex and the quest for leadership into various political offices is also increasing and it is beyond what people perceive it to be. To most people, leadership is the act of having people occupy very high status in the society. Youths equip themselves with just this view, and refuse to consider that leadership is not complete without understanding interactions between a leader and followers.

The agitation for leadership is gradually moving from a true conqueror concept to that of leadership from the most influential. Therefore, in the society today, there are situations of people coming out from nowhere to be elected as leaders so long as they are able to exercise some influence over others through available means. The qualities of true leadership are not considered in the process.

Political leadership is a universal and complex phenomenon with no definite definition too. It implies both political and operational dimension and represents but one of the many categories of leadership, and it is a most elusive one at that. Hart and Rhodes (2014:1) stated that:

> Political leadership has made a comeback. It was studied intensively
> not only by political scientists but also by political sociologists and
> psychologists, political anthropologists, and by scholars in
> comparative and development studies from the 1940s to the 1970s.
> Thereafter, the field lost its way with the rise of structuralism, neo-

> institutionalism, and rational choice approaches to the study of
> politics, government, and governance. Recently, however, students
> of politics have returned to studying the role of individual leaders
> and the exercise of leadership to explain political outcomes.

Alhayany (2018) defines a political leader as one who can properly shape his country's economic and political policy and put his country's interest as precedence, taking into account the interest of other countries, acting independently and not allowing interference in the internal affairs of his country by foreign countries.

More importantly is that, a political leader must possess a sense of empathy, patience, friendliness, interest in societal development, willingness to serve, seeking the consent of the electorates in matters concerning better living of the people, honesty, transparency, power to influence and others. Transformational leadership traits have been linked with knowledge creation, organizational performance, follower self-concordance, work alienation, creativity and higher order motives (Hartley & Morrell, 2006).

According to Langais (2018), reasons for political leadership include among others the quest for power, to seek relevance, to dominate and to free from intimidation and others. And in reference to Max Weber's position as regard the qualities of a political leader, Langais (2018, pp: 51-52) states that:

> Passion, sense of responsibility and glance should act as major
> qualities of a leader. There must be a sense of passion attached to
> the race of becoming a leader for lack of it may not bring out that
> sense of purpose and responsibility in one. On the other hand too, it
> is sense of responsibility that can help one pursue one's goal. That
> of glance is perceived from the angle of detaching from the fact so
> as to be able to maintain permanent capacity of reflection through
> meditation and quietness, implied by this detachment.

Government's initiatives towards promoting youths' involvement in governance
Governments of past and present have not relented in the formulation of different programmes that are expected to benefit the Nigerian youths. Some of Nigeria's initiatives designed for the implementation of International and regional organizations' policies, according to Onah (2001), are:

National Youth Policy (NYP): This policy was formulated in 2009 and clearly concerns the youth. It was designed to protect the interests of the youth as regard empowering them with the desired capacity that will enhance national and personal development. According to the National Youth Policy (2009), "the 2009 National Policy is guided by several national and international policy initiatives, including

national policies for education, gender, health, population for sustainable development, and the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS)."

National Youth Service Corps Scheme (NYSC): This scheme was designed for the Nigerian youths upon University graduation from any part of the world. Graduates above 30 years of age are not allowed to partake in this scheme. Graduates above 30 years are given exemption letters. It was established in 1973 by Nigeria's former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon. The aftermath of Nigerian civil war in 1970, according to NYSC (2018), gave rise to the creation of this scheme. It was established to help rehabilitate, reconstruct and reconcile the people of Nigeria after the war that claimed many lives and property. The major aim of this scheme is for the Nigerian graduate to be tutored along the line of understanding the diverse essence meant for socio-economic and political ties of Nigerians (NYSC-About scheme). Certificates are given upon completion of this programme.

National Youth Assembly of Nigeria (NYAN): This was founded on the basis of making youths to get involved in active participation in national development and good citizenship. According to the National Youth Policy (2009), the assembly is equally structured along the line of playing active role in the implementation of the Nigeria's National Youth Policy.

National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN): The NYCN was established in 1964 but accorded legal backing in 1990. It is a non-partisan and non-profit organization. It also occupies the seat of a major stakeholder in the promotion and implementation of the National Youth Policy. The council is affiliated to World Assembly of Youth and Pan-African Youth Union (National Youth Council of Nigeria). Its aim is to act as a cover for other youth organizations in Nigeria. The council aims at empowerment, peace, health, human rights education and youth programmes as they concern the youth.

Federal Ministry of Youth Development: This ministry was established in 2007. It concerns itself with issues surrounding youths' empowerment that can promote a sense of self-reliance, social responsibility and protection of their interests. It is also the responsibility of the Ministry to ensure the formulation and monitoring of the National Youth Policy, developing programmes of action for youth development.

Students' unionism in tertiary institutions: This has remained an age long activity in Nigerian Universities. It was established in 1955 in University of Ibadan and took full ground in 1960 after the ceremony establishing University of Nigeria (Onah, 2001). It has the mandate to further promote and defend the welfare of students' community in Nigerian tertiary education system (Peter & Ebimobowei, 2015). Its

formulation was aimed at promoting unity, orderliness and smooth relationship between students, school authorities, State and Federal government. According to records, the very first students union tagged West African students' union was established in London by Ladipo Solanke in 1925. In this band were Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Kwame Nkrumah, and others who also joined in the struggle for political emancipation. Their main aim was that of promoting a sense of nationalism among the people of Africa. This move initiated the idea of gaining independence in the West African sub-region of Africa. According to Yusuf (2018), in a democratic country such as Nigeria, it is always a burden on the students' union to be on the forefront of promoting and protecting the interest of its members in their common struggle to achieve the required best in learning. History has shown that even long before independence, students' union had acted the role of a watchdog in checking the excesses of the colonial authorities.

The Trend of young political leaders in the world
The quest for the inclusion of youths in decision- making the world over has obviously improved as the bills covering such are being passed into law. The African Youth Parliament being another good example in walking along the path of embracing the idea of youths' inclusiveness at the helms of decision-making in their countries. Though shrouded by challenges of all kinds, the idea of having the elderly remain as sit-tights is almost becoming old fashioned. From existing records, it is true that for ages now, leaders in some parts of the world are mostly in their 60s and 70s. The case with Africa rightly falls into this description. The trend the world over, has shifted to including those in their 30s, 40s and 50s at present. Attaining this height in age 30s and 40s in any part of the world would mean the exertion of more hard work, experiences and political maneuvering. A list of world young leaders from the year 2017-2018, according to Bolaji, Manafa and Saba (2015), includes:

i.   Leo Varadker was 38 when he became the Prime Minister of Ireland.
ii.   Saleh Ali Al-Sammad at 38 became the President of the Supreme Political Council of Yemen.
iii.   Sebastian Kurz turned 31 as he won an election to become the President of Austria.
iv.   Jacinda Arden was 37 when she contested and won to become New Zealand's Prime Minister.
v.   Emmanuel Macron was 39 when he won an election to become the President of France.
vi.   Alain Berse was in his 40s when he became Swiss President.
vii.   Matteo Ciacci was the Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino. He was 28 when he took over this seat. Reigned from April- October, 2018.
viii.   Enrico Carattoni was 32 years when he took over from Matteo Ciacci in October, 2018.

Africa is equally not left out in recording the reign of Presidents in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s from 1940s-date. Some of such Presidents, as mentioned by Bolaji, Manafa and Saba (2015), include:

    i.   Valentine Strasser was 25 years old when he assumed office of the President of Sierra Leone in 1992.

    ii.   Michel Micombero of Burundi became the Prime Minister at the age of 25 in 1940.

    iii.   Nnamdi Azikiwe became the President of Nigeria in his 30s in 1963.

    iv.   Sadiq Al-Mahdi was the Prime Minister of Sudan at the age of 30 in 1966.

    v.   Marine Ngouabi was elected the President of the Republic of Congo at the age of 30 in 1969.

    vi.   Joseph Kabila Kabange (President of Congo) is the youngest African President who ascended this position at the death of his father. He was only 29 years old when he took over office as the President of Congo in 2001. He is 48 years old at present.

    vii.   Faure Gnassingbe was 51 as the President of Togo.

    viii.   George Weah was 51 as the Liberian President

    ix.   Adama Barrow was aged 52 as Gambian President.

    x.   Pierre Nkurunziza was 54 as the President of Burundi.

    xi.   Uhuru Kenyatta was 55 as the President of Kenya and the youngest President in East Africa as at then.

The Nigerian case
The era of colonial rule in Nigeria witnessed a harvest of deep-rooted traditional rulers who were able to exercise limited authority over the affairs of their land due to the heavy presence of the colonial masters and their system of governance. At this point, the Nigerian traditional rulers worked indirectly under the dictates of the western rulership. This finally came to an end as Nigeria clocked independence in 1960 through the efforts of some nationalists of which Nnamdi Azikiwe was one of them. He became Nigeria's first President (in his 30s) in 1963 when Nigeria was declared a Federal Republic.

The turn of the military came up after series of coup that plunged various military officers into leadership roles. It was in one of these attempts that General Yakubu in his 30s then, came into power as the military Head of State in 1967. This era heralded the season of a hold in the chances of the Nigerian youth occupying the highest seat of power once again. The trend of young Nigerians occupying leadership positions started dwindling after this period and by the year, 1980, very few political leaders in their 40s vied for political seats. The year 1998 heralded the entrant of another military leader, General Abdulsalami Abubakar. He took over as the Head of State and was

able to lift the ban on political activities (Timeline of Nigerian history). This period witnessed the era of youths being relegated to the background and were rather used as political thugs by those in power.

Governors in states in Nigeria in their 40s and 50s, according to Ogurombi (2017), are:
 i.   Yahaya Bello of Kogi state was 42 years of age.
 ii.   Ben Ayade as the Governor of Cross-Rivers State was 48 years old.
 iii. Zamfara Abdulaziz of Zamfara State was aged 48.
 iv.   Abubakar was the Governor of Niger State and was 49 years old.
 v.   Kashim Shettima was 51 and the Governor of Borno State while
 vi.   Udom Emmanuel was 51 and occupied the seat of the Governor of Akwa Ibom State.

Nigeria's legislature also had a fair share of this trend of young political leaders. They are as follows:
  i. Bankole Oladimeji was 37 years old (from Abeokuta South Federal Constituency of Ogun state) when he became the speaker, House of Representatives.
  ii. Isah Hamma Misau of Bauchi State, Dino Melaye of Kogi State, Nyako Abdulaziz of Adamawa State, Suleiman Nazif of Bauchi North, Philips Tanimu Aduda of FCT, Olamilekun Adeola representing Lagos West, Babajide Omoworare of Osun East and others, were also in their 40s when they were elected into the National Assembly.

Challenges of youths in political leadership in Nigeria
The Nigerian youths are bedeviled with series of challenges in playing meaningful roles in political activities. Some of the challenges are enumerated here.
  i. Lack of self-confidence: Nigerian youths lack self-confidence because of youthful exuberance, drugs involvement and lack of leadership preparedness.
  ii. Lack of knowledge of historical facts: Many youths do not know the political history of Nigeria. This information is available, but how many youths are willing and ready to access them in textbooks and one-on-one interactions with their teachers, elders and other. Having this knowledge is capable of arousing keen interest in the youth in pursuing these leadership positions, knowing they have the capacity to work just like their past leaders did in their prime. In the opinion of Ogurombi (2017), "there must be a vivid awareness of the nation's political history: how she came into existence, her battle with British colonialists before independence, her short-lived first, second and third republics, her long years of military rule…"
  iii. Inability to foot the bills of running elections. The starting point which is the purchase of party forms can be unobtainable by the youths due to the exorbitant prices placed on them.
  iv. Lack of sponsorship can also act as hindrance to youths' involvement in political leadership in Nigeria. Some of these youths may not have the wherewithal to

enable them partake in elections and may need the help of elites in the society but in most cases, this is unattainable except it has to do with their biological children or strong allies.

v. Hostility attached to politics acts as a scarecrow to some youths who are not interested in violent acts. For this reason then, some of them stay away from political activities.

vi. A sense of ulterior motive. Some intend getting into such political leadership for monetary gains and if this is the case, such candidates end up losing a sense of focus and direction as to where and what the society expects of them.

Others are intimidation from the elites, non-partisan attitude and complacency, lack of leadership qualities, inability to build right capacity, refusal of major parties to grant the youth open space to contest and others. In addition is the comment by Ogurombi (2017) where he states that, young candidates will not get far unless there are more extensive changes to the broader electoral system and political culture too.

Prospects for youths' involvement in political leadership in Nigeria

The adoption of the African Youth Charter of 2006 by African Union Heads of States and Governments in Banjul (Gambia), which has been ratified by 38 Member States and signed by 42 Member States is also another legal step taken up by the African Union in pursuit of the betterment of the African youth. The Charter serves the purpose of providing a background for the drive on youths' empowerment and development at the continental, regional and national levels. It is also aimed at strengthening, reinforcing and consolidating efforts made towards empowering young Africans through their involvement and equal partnership with relevant bodies involved in formulating and implementing Africa's development plans. Aside its formation, Member States are also expected to develop specific Ministries that will ensure the implementation of the expectations of this Charter (Essayed, 2018).

The Not-Too-Young-To-Run law: This has been passed into law, but the youths having the ability to implement its objectives may remain a mirage. A good example was noted recently in the purchase of the 2019 presidential forms. In accordance to this law, the age for Presidency has been brought down from 40 to 35. That of Governorship and House of Representatives had been reduced to 30 and 25 years of age respectively. The average age limit for parliamentarians the world over is 53 while the minimum mark is 25 years. This description clearly indicates that, youths still have a place in the rulership of their country. Then the question of how many youths shall be able to get these tickets at the end of it all will still come up based on what is seen on ground in most countries of which Nigeria is not an exception. In expressing his concern over this law, Ogurombi (2017) retorted that:

> …their activism of Not-Too-Young-To-rule may slip into insignificance if there is no back up electoral reforms or if the monetary aspects of our politics are not resolved, money plays a huge role in Nigerian politics and successful election campaigns. It is one thing to be ambitious and it is another thing to have the resources to bring your ambition to life because politics is extremely costly in Nigeria.

This step taken by the youth could be further promoted and sustained with the aid of a very strong legal framework, "mental magnitude and financial altitude" (Ogurombi, 2017).

Education: This remains a veritable tool to unlocking potentials in people. Acquiring this helps to plunge the youth to having access to job opportunities, transformation of negative attitude and behavior, acquisition of skills and right knowledge. A country that has an increase in the rate of out-of-school children on yearly basis, is heading towards distress. The endorsement of the African Youth Charter is recorded to be one good effort being taken by the African Union. It is the first legal framework designed to work in consonance with youths' development in Africa. And part of its mandate is to support the promotion of education and youths' empowerment (among others) throughout Africa (Essayed, 2018). The Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) number 4 is equally put in place by the UN to further drive home the need to acquire quality education that can help the youths become responsible and effective citizens.

Non-involvement in capacity training: This may also deny some of them the opportunity of occupying any elective position. A good number of Nigerian youths are very keen on making money fast. Only a few politically-minded ones are willing, thirsty and ready to get involved in capacity training. Lack of such training will not only retard their growth but will deny them the opportunity of being fully equipped with the right sense of judgment/critical thinking/knowledge and decision-making. Until the youths start retracing their steps towards getting trained and retrained, the prospect of gaining access to political leadership roles in Nigeria may remain unattainable.

The quest by International Organizations: emphasis has always being laid by the International Organizations (such as UN, IMF, World Bank) for the recognition and implementation of policies, protocols, agreements, and programs meant for youths' development. In spite of all these, the youths are still denied the opportunity of easy access to political leadership.

Employment opportunities: A very appreciable number of Nigerian youths are unemployed at present. According to Bolaji, Manafa and Saba (2015), the case of

political thuggery is on the increase and can be curbed if and when the thoughts of these youths are redirected along the line of being gainfully employed. The quest for the sustenance of different moves of getting the youths employed should be made intense. Getting a reasonable number of youths employed in the next 5-10 years would help take them off the line of getting involved in criminal activities and in so doing, would rechannel their energy and thoughts towards engaging in responsible politics and taking up leadership roles. Generally, the concern about youth unemployment has driven some African countries along the line of engaging youths in available empowerment programs so as to keep them away from getting involved in criminal activities that can hamper personal and societal progress.

Politics of thuggery: This seems to be the norm of the day to some youths who manage to delve into politics. Bolaji, Manafa and Saba (2015) believe that more worrisome is the fact that most of them are between the ages of 15 – 30 years. These thugs are fully equipped with arms and ammunitions which are later diverted to their personal use after elections. The incessant cases of loss of lives and property, kidnapping, rape, ritual killings are partly occurring as a result of the availability of these weapons. Their refusal to play thuggery would render the act unattractive to the elites who would always want to seek their services.

Exclusion of youths in political parties' programmes: This stands to be one of the challenges bedeviling youths as regard their low participation in electoral matters. The exclusion of youths in real matters concerning political parties is enough to make youths develop a sense of apathy towards political activities and the resultant effect being that, they cannot sit on the fence and expect political leadership roles to be given on a platter of gold. According to the UNDP (2012), the youth voter turnout of African countries revealed that youth voters are less participated than older citizens.

Sustaining the cadence: The sense of zealousness displayed by the youths in making the not too young to run bill be passed into law can serve as a reassurance that, they can record successes in the pursuit of taking up leadership roles in the political arena. In accordance with this, is the statement by Essayed (2018) "the successes we have recorded with the movement so far are historic in themselves because it shows the power of young people to change the nation and bring glory to Nigeria." Essayed (2018) in buttressing the importance of youths' involvement in the development of the continent states that, "indeed, Africa's renaissance cannot be realized if adequate investment is not made in the youth who constitute about 40 percent of the African population." This call can be adopted by the Nigerian leaders also. The programmes, policies and agreements reached should not remain as policy framework only but should be action-oriented. Until this step is taken, the prospect of youths' involvement in political leadership in Nigeria may continue to be shrouded by a state of uncertainty.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it has been revealed that the quest for youths' involvement in political leadership is not something extraordinary in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The pictures being painted over the years seem to state that, there is a slim possibility of youths' involvement in Nigeria's political leadership roles again. As a country, retracing this action would not be out of place since available records display the achievements of such leaders as fairly remarkable. The role of leadership can be placed on any age so long as the desired and expected qualities are expressed by those concerned. Helping to make the Nigerian society a better place for all is possible when the teeming youths are swept off the strongholds of the challenges mentioned earlier.

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