

I am not
too young
to rule

POLICY BRIEF

**ON YOUTH INCLUSION IN
POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE:
PRAGMATIC STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING
VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA.**



This Policy Brief examines how youth inclusion in politics and governance could contribute to addressing the complex push and pull factors influencing some youth to engage in vices that could ultimately make them susceptible to radicalization to violent extremism. It sees the inclusion of youth in politics and governance as a pragmatic strategy capable of preventing Violent Extremism because of its potentials to mobilize strengths, appropriately channel energies and increases youth's voices. This will inevitably open a new vista and cause the transition of youths to agents of conflict transformation, making contributions to policies and projects that prevent violence extremism, strengthen peace, and enhance development.



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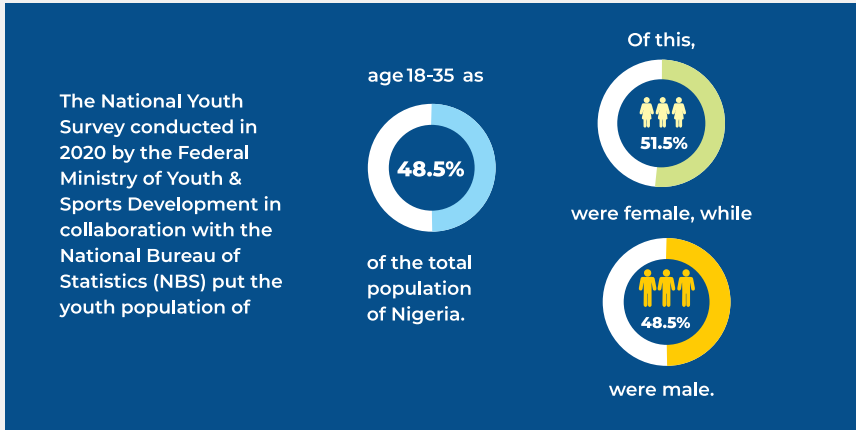


INTRODUCTION

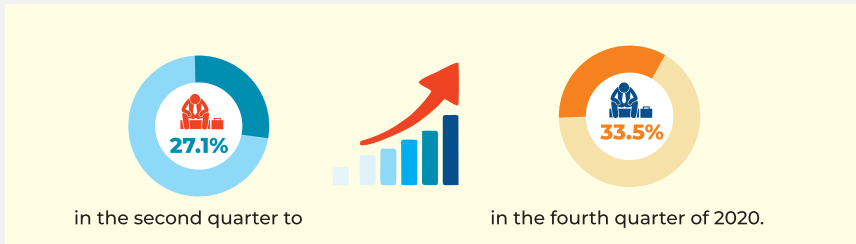
In recent times, there have been troubling concerns across the country about the current state of the Nigerian youth. Issues relating to access to functional education, learning and self-development opportunities, employment, social security, inclusion in politics and governance are intersecting concerns that need urgent attention. This is highly important in order not to continue in the same trajectory of youth vulnerability to radicalization, violent extremism, among other vices. Effective change can hardly be made through a political system that excludes the youth. In seeking solutions to problems confronting the youth in Nigeria, inclusion is crucial. Ownership is important. There is no problem that Nigeria has today that is as fundamental as the raging violent extremism and the consequential damage it has caused to lives, livelihoods, property, and communities. A large proportion of those who perpetrate this act of violence are youth. They are often the most affected. Hence, the participation of youth in addressing the problems of countering violent extremism as well as Preventing Violent Extremism is a sine qua non. Nigerian youth must occupy their space in politics and governance, where attempts to impose change by generations of rulers outside their age (youth) bracket have failed. They must be supported to deploy their energies, invest their talents, and engage their intellects for creative solutions to solving problems that affect them in multi-dimensional ways. Preventing violent extremism is a national task that must be done. Youth, both male and female must play a pivotal role!

NIGERIAN YOUTH AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

The burgeoning youth population in Nigeria constitutes the bulk of the Nigerian numerical strength.



Also, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) affirmed that unemployment increased from



During this period, it was reported that 12,160,178 Nigerians, largely youth were without jobs. The unemployment rate among youth, age 15-34 was 42.5 per cent. On a year-to-year basis, NBS put the increase in Nigeria's inflation rates at 18.60 per cent in June 2022. This was 0.84 percent point higher than the figure of 17.75 percent for June 2021. However, as at August 2022, Nigeria's inflation rate got to 20.12%, the highest in the past 17 years. This is in addition to the fact that public universities have been shut down due to the strike that the university teachers have embarked on since February 2022. The reasons for the strike include poor funding for university education, infrastructural and instructional deficit and poor service conditions among others.

Hence, functional education and critical infrastructure to support youth development are absent. This huge population of youth is weighed down by chronic unemployment, social and economic dislocation and are severely vulnerable to radicalization to violent extremism. These existential challenges facing the young people in Nigeria are often ignored in governance and development planning. Little or nothing is being done to address their concerns. So, for those who understand the importance of countries planning adequately for their youth, it is not strange that Nigeria is very volatile on account of its youth being neglected. A country in which thousands, if not millions of young people graduate every year from its secondary and tertiary institutions with governments at all levels having no deliberate plans whatsoever for them to have an army of youths to deal with. Worse is that these young people feel excluded in a closed society that Nigeria is ghastly becoming, with characteristically unequal opportunities, including the opportunity for inclusion.

Olajuyigbe (2021) acknowledged that a closed society is bound to witness open chaos. Equity, fairness, and justice are traditional ingredients for sustaining a stable and orderly society. The spiral waves of anarchy being witnessed today flow from fountains of governmental failure to sustain an open and just society that protects the poor and defends the rich. It is idle not to expect that unjust state will become an awful horror film of unending tragedies. Looking at factors for radicalization, in its notes, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) stated that “Experts believe that radicalization is the result of a complex overlap of concurring and mutually reinforcing factors, unique to each context and to a certain extent, each individual. The process of radicalization begins with changes in self-identification due to grievances, frequently driven by personal or group concerns regarding local issues as well as international events. A grievance is understood to create the sense of alienation or disenchantment that provides a cognitive opening for radicalization.” This dominant opening for radicalization stemmed from socio-economic factors, such as youth unemployment, injustice, corruption, lack of faith in leadership, democracy, and the system.

It also includes unequal access to resources and opportunities. Olajuyigbe (2020), explained this in his treatise on the Almajirin system in Northern Nigeria. He stated that ‘the way Almajiri is practised today in the North has moral issues of slavery, deprivation, child abuse and adverse implications for child development. It breeds delinquencies and encourages begging and other practices inimical to the child. Unmistakably, the way the system

is run today has set it in collision with civilization to the extent that Almajiris are excluded from basic formal functional education and with highly oiled indoctrination to sustain the exclusion and justify such abuse.'

In fact, exclusion in politics and governance has become breeding grounds for many of the push factors radicalizing the young population. The pull factors also include desperation for recognition by moving away from the society of rejection, embracing peer-influenced recruitment by violent groups, the opportunity for resources and the ability to validate the use of violence as veritable means to achieve results.





POLITICS, GOVERNANCE AND YOUTH: Responding to Exclusion!

In democracy, politics is the process that produces government through elections. Government is the structure that drives institutions that brew policies, laws and projects that translate to growth and development. In as much as these are the instruments through which good governance, including reducing the risk of vulnerability can be archived, it becomes urgent to address the issue of youth exclusion. Inclusion of youth who are often perpetrators and at the same time victims of violent extremism will strengthen the Government's preventive and responsive mechanisms which are the most critical aspects of building a stable and resilient society.

It is critical that youth are targeted for inclusion and participation in the political process and governance. This is because when youth are involved in leadership responsibilities, they ensure that the special needs of youth, female, male, and children are captured in development plans and policy interventions. In addition, youth can also press for political or policy change when they have a leadership platform to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

What is the extent of youths' involvement in politics? How much are they engaged in governance? Answers to these questions are more likely to reveal that youth are on the low side than on the high side. This is because most Nigerian youth are encumbered with challenges and hindrances that need to be addressed before they can participate. Hence, in addressing the challenges facing the Nigerian youth, there are innovative and inclusive strategies that can be deployed to effectively encourage and enlist youth participation.

Therefore, to formulate strategies for the full integration of youth's concerns, and inclusion in politics and governance, the following recommendations are essential:

1

Develop a National Youth Strategy: A national youth strategy represents a vision that helps to ensure public engagement which sets the rules of the game and defines clear roles for their vital participation of all levels of government as well as among other relevant non-state actors. The formation, articulation and implementation of this strategy should be an inclusive process to establish high levels of participation, to create a consensus on the vision, and most importantly, to consider the needs of youths. This strategy must address the social, cultural and economic factors standing as barriers against the inclusion of the Nigerian youth in politics and governance. This strategy must be well funded because investing in youth is a highly strategic and cost-effective answer to peace and development challenges of today.

2

Political Party Strategic Plan for Youth Leadership: Every political party must develop Strategic Plan for its youth wing. Political Parties and their leadership should prioritize and support the building of capacity of young people in their parties and encourage them to take-up responsibilities. A combination of factors is required to create an enabling environment for youth inclusion. First, it starts with ensuring the full enjoyment of membership rights and privileges by young people, including right to vote, and be voted for.

3

Engaging Youth in Violent Conflicts: Youth face distinct risks in situations of violent conflict. They are more likely than children to be recruited into fighting actors' cohorts; become targets and miss

out on education opportunities. Male and female youth may face all of these risks, but females are often, particularly at risk and face distinct consequences. At a critical time like this, the first response to youth-led conflict should be engagement and not outright use of state force. Failure to support these young people at this critical juncture in their lives poses an increased threat to them and the society.

4

Provide Social Protection Schemes: This will help poor youth cope with periods of unemployment and unexpected shocks due to such events as economic setbacks and conflict. Youth are often the first to be dismissed in a recession and the last to be hired in more flourishing times. Extending and improving the quality of social protection and providing coverage in the informal economy can prevent youth poverty and cushion their hardship experience in livelihood fluctuations.

5

Prioritize Formal and Non-formal Education/Learning: Effective formal and non-formal education is important in preventing violent extremism as well as making radicalization difficult. They also contribute to building leadership at all levels. It is important that efforts be made to reach youth who have dropped out of the formal education system before acquiring basic literacy skills and provide them with education or training through informal educational means, such as skill acquisitions that will enhance their life skills and employability.

6

TARGETED POLICIES FOR YOUTHS THAT ARE BASED ON EVIDENCE AND DATA : Political parties must change their courses of action when engaging with youths, as messages and policies that are targeted at youths are often perceived as weak, lacking credibility, and insincerity. Overtime, this has led to low trust in the political and governance processes among young people, especially among the more critically minded youth with higher levels of political consciousness, who might be skeptical and disappointed with politicians and their actions. A continuous and systematic evidence-based approach to youth policies and young people's interests can therefore provide politicians with much needed credibility, and ultimately lead to higher levels of trust between young people and the political system. Political parties should therefore engage with and support the research organizations, and civil society groups involved in youth-related research when drafting manifestoes and policy documents.



In conclusion, as part of the strategies to drive youth inclusion in politics and governance, there must be deliberate effort to respond to issues of youth unemployment and the challenges of livelihoods and leadership. We must engage political parties as well as government at all levels to transform our political and government systems to be more responsive to the needs of young people, thereby resulting in sustained impact on youth development. We can accomplish this through supporting platforms of political parties and government for dignified inclusion of youth; thereby integrating youth inclusive approaches and models of participation, protection and representation into politics and governance. This will expand opportunities for young people. Promoting youth inclusion should be a critical aspect of our national plan and national development.

In doing these, we will be able to build synergy and strengthen coordinated response as well as carry out informed interventions of preventing violent extremism in Nigeria. It will also provide bases for mobilisation of ideas and deployment of energies of the youth to achieving positive ends. This engagement of youth will help in preventing radicalisation to violent extremism.

Hence, political parties and governments at all levels should establish systems to ensure the recognition and validation of youth as critical agents of change that any society that yearns for sustainable peace and development can adopt. Their inclusion in politics and governance is not only necessary but imperative!

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