

Democratization Process and Youth Participation in Nigeria's South East: A Post-Mortem on 2019 General Elections

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Abstract

The role of youths in the political process cannot be overemphasized. If properly utilized, their energy stands to make positive impact on the political system and this can be felt in the electoral and governance process through such means as participating actively in political campaigns, contesting for political offices, voting during elections, acting as electoral officers, holding political offices, making active inputs of demand/support on the political system, etc. If, on the other hand, they are not properly guided, their manner of participation can create catastrophic impact on the system. Indeed, the manner and extent to which the youths engage in these political activities differ from one political environment to another. Using the activities surrounding the Nigeria's 2019 general elections, this study seeks to appraise the nature of political participation by the youths in the south eastern part of the country and its implication on the democratic process. The study is qualitative in nature and relies mainly on secondary sources for data gathering while relying on content analysis in analysing them. Findings reveal that the manner of political participation of the youths in the south eastern part of Nigeria leaves much to be desired and this is attributable to improper political socialization. The basic recommendation is that there is urgent need to engage the youths in political education and reorientation so as to guide them responsibly towards making meaningful political participation with a view to deepening the democratic values and culture.

Keywords: Democratization, election, political education, Political participation, political socialization, youths.

Introduction

Nigeria is facing serious socio-political and economic challenges. Given her immense natural resources and in view of her poor performance, it stands to reason that the country's problems revolve around human factor. Just as Odum (2017) posited that Nigeria has not been fortunate with the kind of leadership at her disposal, Achebe (1983) has opined that Nigeria's problem rests squarely on her leadership. Given that it is leadership that has kept the country in her despicable state, the picture of the country's future looks gloomy in the light of the fact that no conscious effort is being made to address the current leadership problem and that the 'leaders of tomorrow' are not equipped to do things better.

The problems associated with leadership in the country cannot be divorced from the undemocratic character of the Nigerian state. Though democracy may not serve as the panacea to Nigeria's socio-political and economic problems, it is quite agreeable that it can go a long way in mitigating them to a large extent. If, for instance, citizens live up to their democratic responsibilities such as engaging in responsible political participation and demanding for the accountability of the political office holders, leadership is likely to take better shape. It is in line with this thinking that Vande and Jooji (2017) made attempts to draw a link between the Civil Society and good governance.

The youths constitute a quite appreciable percentage of the Nigerian population. By this, they remain an indispensable asset in the democratic process. However, the Nigerian youths do not seem to be playing their expected roles in the democratic process. Are the youths from the eastern part of Nigeria committed to the democratic process with regard to political participation? There are strong indications that the youths from the South-Eastern part of the country have not lived up to expectations within the political arena with regard to positive participation and in line with democratic principles. As it seems, they are not being properly groomed to take up their challenges responsibly. Rather than prepare them for quality leadership rooted in democratic ideals, the youths are the ones being deployed by the older politicians to engage in the numerous electoral malpractices identified by Odum (2021) and Nnadozie (2007), which have continued to constitute serious problem for the country. Indeed, the youths appear grossly unprepared to challenge or resist what seems like deliberate machinations and design by the older politicians to exclude them from engaging in meaningful and responsible political participation. The greater danger is that they seem to have accepted and even decided to live with the defeatist mindset that they can never challenge or rise beyond the machinations of the older politicians. Saddled with this mindset, it will prove an uphill task for them to wake up to the realities of the moment and play positive role in the democratic process. It is the concerns raised by the manner of political participation of the youths in the South-Eastern part of the country that gave rise to this study. The aim here is to use the relevant activities surrounding the Nigeria's 2019 general elections as a focal point to appraise the political participation of youths in the south east and their contributions towards the democratization process.

Conceptual Issues

In discussing the process level of political culture, *Almond*, Powell Jr., Strom, and Dalton (2004) highlighted three different patterns that describe the citizens' role in the political process, which include the participants, the subjects, and the parochials. According to them, Parochials, who may be illiterates living in remote rural areas or simply those who ignore politics and its impact on their lives, are hardly aware of government and politics. Subjects obey government officials and the law passively but they do not vote or get involved actively in politics. Participants are involved as actual or potential participants in the political process, and they are not only informed about politics and make demands on the polity but also grant their support to political leaders based on performance.

Though the above classification vis-a-vis their basic attributes is quite helpful in understanding the issue at hand, it may not fit neatly into the general aspects of political participation, which can take different dimensions. The likely conclusion to be drawn is that Participants possess the following attributes: (a) they are well informed about politics; (b) they make demands on the polity; and (c) they grant support to political leaders based on performance. However, the attributes are not exhaustive to the extent of capturing all the shades of political participation vis-a-vis the Nigerian political environment.

The democratization process, as it relates to elections, involve certain political activities that include registration of voters, registration of political parties, campaigns and political rallies, elections, etc. An active participant in the political process is expected to register as a voter. Even without joining a particular political party or moving around with contestants during political campaigns, the person is expected to understand the basic issues surrounding the different political parties and the political promises they make. Above all, the person is expected to vote on the day of the election. In a nutshell, political participation can be conceptualised generally in terms of taking active part in the political process. However, it is not every type of participation that promotes the democratization process. For instance, those that perpetrate violence during campaigns and elections, snatch elections materials, or engage in rigging of elections are actually active participants. In fact, Participants whose participation is in the form of perpetrating violence and terrorizing voters during elections constitute grave danger to the democratic process and are even worse than those classified as parochial and subjects. This is because they have the capacity to scare away responsible voters and force them into the apathetic state thereby shrinking the democratic space. Equally, there are those that go through the process of registering as voters, participating in political rallies, and voting during the elections but without being properly informed about the issues that should guide their electoral choices. As such, there are participants that attend rallies with the hope of receiving gifts from politicians and cast votes to the highest bidder. Such group of people give their support to leaders based on blind loyalty and not necessarily based on performance, meaning that they are incapable of demanding for accountability. The nature of political participation envisaged in a system is the type that arises from the possession of civic capacities, as listed by Appadorai (2004), which involve three basic qualities that include: intelligence, self-control, and conscience. Undoubtedly, an intelligent person with good measure of self-control and conscience is most unlikely to perform his/her civic responsibilities in the breach.

Generally speaking, the form of political participation envisaged from citizens is the type that falls in line with the attributes of the democratic citizen, as described by Almond and Verba (1963), who is expected to engage in rational participation. This suggests that the person is not only expected to be involved but also active and must be rational in his/her approach to politics by being guided by reason rather than emotion. The person's voting choices should be guided by careful assessment of the public goods and services s/he would like the government to provide and the likely channel this can be achieved. In fact, it is the type of participation that promotes rather than harms the political system. The yardstick being used here to measure the participation of youths in the democratization process include being active, informed, and positively oriented towards politics. In specific

terms, the activities they are expected to engage in include registering as voters, vying for elective positions, voting during elections, and engaging political office holders positively in terms of demanding for accountability.

Theoretical Issues

The theory of political elite that took shape under the active discussion of social scientists such as Roberto Michels, Vilfredo Pareto, Jose Ortega Y. Gasset, and Gaetano Mosca, as indicated by Ogundiwin (2015) and Varma (2004), helps us to conceptualise the society as consisting of two sets of people – the elite (both the governing and the non-governing) and the non-elite. The elite, generally speaking, are those that have attained the topmost echelon in their field of endeavour. They are the masters in the game of their profession. In the political realms, the political elite who are usually by far smaller in number occupy the higher stratum while the non-elite (or the masses) that constitute the majority in the society occupy the lower stratum. The governing elite tries to maintain itself in power through what Pareto refers to as *residues of combination* (cunning) and *persistence of aggregates* (force). By implication, there are two types of governing elites – those who rule by cunning (civilians) and those who rule by force (dictators).

The basic thing is that the elite who are in minority are more organised than the non-elite. That is to say, the elite (minority) have the capacity to hold down the vast majority and continue to exercise political control over them. As Varma (2004) puts it, they “dupe the masses into subservience” by ensuring that their (elite) actions and decisions appear logical in the eyes of the masses. The greatest undoing of the masses lies in their inability to get organised. Thus, the individual in the majority stands alone before the elite and this explains why they appear helpless when it comes to advancing their own cause.

Democracy may have its deficiencies but one of its strongest points is its attribute of inclusiveness in the decision making process. From the discussions of Tom (2015), one can make out the following as the main argument of the Democratic Consent theorists, (i) participation guarantees legitimacy, (ii) when a person consents to the creation of a political society, he necessarily consents to the use of majority rule in deciding how the political society is to be organised, (iii) when people participate in the democratic process, by their act of participation they consent to the outcome, even if that outcome goes against them, and (iv) it is whatever the people choose that determines the line of action to be taken by the government.

One of the points raised by Tom (2015) in his discourse is that politicians in a multiparty democracy with free elections and free press have incentives to respond to the expressions of the needs of the poor. By implication, the politicians are compelled to be on their toes with the instruments of elections and the watchful eyes of the free press. This point underscores the essence of participation in the democratization process. These instruments of elections and free press will definitely become useless to the democratization process if citizens fail to take them up responsibly.

The major criticism launched against the Democratic Consent theory revolves around the question of how the consent of the majority can be treated as consent by all. This is to the extent that the minority actually disagreed with the position of the majority over the issue at hand but are still bound by the position of the majority and are deemed to have

consented. This question can however be resolved by the notion of 'general interest'. As a matter of fact, general interest may not necessarily translate to the interest of every single person within the community. Even issues that appear under the garb of public interest may not positively serve the interest of every single individual within the society. In fact, it is unimaginable to have a society where everybody must necessarily agree on a particular course of action before it is taken. Bearing in mind that one is bound by the decision of the consenting majority, active participation becomes imperative because the views of those that never participated will be counted as part of the views of the minority. For instance, the population of Nigeria is well over hundred million. Yet, the total vote recorded in the 2019 presidential elections is below thirty million. By democratic standards and the electoral principle of participation, the people that voted for President Buhari are the majority. Those who did not participate do not count.

This study adopts a blend of the Elite theory and the Democratic Consent theory of authority in analysing issues concerning the youths' political participation in the South East vis-a-vis its implication on the democratization process.

A Brief Survey of Nigeria's Journey to Democratization

Having been founded on the pedestal of gunboat diplomacy, it is not out of order to say that Nigeria did not take off on a democratic footing. However, the sowing of the seeds for the emergence of electoral democracy in the country can be traced to the colonial era with the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1922 by Herbert Macaulay preparatory to the 1923 general election. The election, the first of its kind to take place in the country, was conducted for the purpose of electing four candidates to represent only two towns (Calabar and Lagos) as unofficial members of the then Central Legislative Council (Odum, 1996). The space for electoral democracy continued to widen as the country inched closer to the date of her independence. For instance, more vibrant political parties emerged in the early fifties when the country was preparing for the indirect election held for the purposes of selecting members of the newly created Regional legislatures from amongst whom members of the Central Legislature were to be selected (Kurfi, 1983). In clear terms, the regional elections that took place in Nigeria during the colonial era include the 1923, 1951, 1953, 1956, 1957 elections while the federal elections took place in 1954 and 1959.

To the extent that general elections were conducted in 1959 (on the eve of independence) to elect the indigenous leaders that would pilot the affairs of the country, one can say that the Nigerian state was ushered into independence on the wings of electoral democracy. However, this period of democratic experimentation did not last beyond the first six years of the country's independence. Meanwhile, the democratic experience was quite unsavoury, as the politicking and elections conducted within the period showed signs of democratic anaemia; signs that the politicians were yet to imbibe democratic culture. Hence, Nigeria witnessed a sharp reversal and total collapse of democracy in 1966 when the military struck and eventually took over full political control of the country, suspending all democratic structures in the process.

The country got back to the path of electoral democracy about thirteen years later (in 1979) when the transition programme of the military junta eventually succeeded in

delivering the general elections. Again, the space for electoral democratic experimentation was so short, as the Second Republic lasted barely for four years before the military struck again in 1983 and took over full political control. This second coming of the military lasted from 1983 to 1999. It is necessary to mention that, as part of her endless transition to civil rule programme aimed at launching the country into the Third Republic, the military junta organised elections between December, 1991 (gubernatorial and legislative elections) and June, 1993 (presidential election). The elections went on smoothly and were considered successful. However, the hopes of ushering in the much expected Third Republic were dashed as the military junta led by Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential elections. The annulment brought that particular phase of transition to civil rule programme to an abrupt end and threw the country into serious crisis. It was in the process that the military set up an Interim National Government (ING). The setting up of the ING on 27th August, 1993 turned out eventually to be a ploy by the junta to hold on to power because this government that was rendered powerless ab initio lasted for about three months only. After dissolving the ING on 17th November, 1993, the junta led by Sani Abacha took full control of political power once again.

In what appeared to be a divine intervention, the military junta led by Abdulsalami Abubakar, who took over the government after the death of Abacha, eventually eased itself out of power and allowed the country to get back on the path of electoral democracy in 1999. In clear terms, the general elections conducted in Nigeria within the independence era took place as follows: 1964/5, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019. Thus, Nigeria has witnessed six uninterrupted general elections from 1999 to 2019. Though the country's performance is still poor when weighed on the scale of democracy, the good news for democracy still remains that the military has not truncated the democratization process with their usual coup d'état. The assaults being launched at the democratic process within the period are emanating mainly from politicians and are occurring under the civilian dispensation.

Historical Overview of Youths' Political Participation in the Nigerian State

The contributions of the youths towards the making of the Nigerian state cannot be overemphasised. They participated actively in political activities during the colonial days and played significant roles in the anti-colonial struggles. It is quite clear that during the colonial era, the youths had a high level of political consciousness and this explains the reason they were able to participate in the formation of political movements with which they engaged in nationalist or anti-colonial struggles. Using Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik), for instance, it can be seen that the youths of that era had the mindset to be politically active and they were actually guided by positive orientations. As Ofoegbu (1989) pointed out, Zik began to draw political inspiration from the likes of J.E.K. Aggrey at the tender age of sixteen. Zik and indeed other pioneer Nigerians who travelled abroad in those early years to study were guided by the actual life situations back home, as they engaged in their political activities. On their return, they were able to participate actively in politics and draw political followership. Their activities culminated into the granting of independence by the colonialists.

The manner and nature of political participation, which the youths engaged in during the independence era, began to change with time. To begin with, the political elite that fought for independence changed the trajectory of political participation and the democratization exercise. While they appeared united in driving away the colonialists and enthroning home rule, it was noticeable that they were divided in the pursuit of nationalism. Thus, stiff competition and struggles ensued among them as they operated from narrow ethnic disposition rather than broad nationalistic platform. In their bid to capture political power at all costs, they resorted to politics of bitterness and in most cases, political violence. It goes without saying that the orientation and roles of the youths being recruited and socialized into politics under the period would differ significantly from what was obtained during the early days of colonialism. Since the interest of the political elite was to capture political power by all means, which would warrant adopting undemocratic practices if the need arises, the political socialization and education given to the politically-active youths invariably tilted towards the undemocratic order. Armed with ethnic sentiments, the elites succeeded in creating charismatic influence on their (ethnic) followers and this affected the sense of judgement and political choices of the citizens across the country. In the final analysis, the Nigeria's First Republic collapsed due to the undemocratic manner the political elite engaged in politics and it can be imagined how such undemocratic environment affected the political attitude of the youths.

The coup d'état that occurred in 1966, which launched Nigeria into full military dictatorship and eroded all the existing democratic structures, caused serious problems in the system. It is noteworthy that most of the military officers that held political offices were youths within their early and late twenties. There were names like Alfred Diète-Spiff that was appointed as the governor of Rivers state at the age of 24. In line with the general belief that the eyes of the military opened up after eating the political forbidden fruit, it can be understood that even the minds of the youths within the military became poisoned and got oriented towards abusing and disrespecting democratic ideals.

By the time the country returned to civilian rule in 1979, the civil environment had already been militarized. Again, the main political actors that operated within the period were the same old politicians that held sway during the First Republic. They continued with their old acts and even advanced the undemocratic game to greater heights during the 1983 elections. Within the period, the youth wings of political parties turned out to be the military arm of the parties. It was from that repository that the parties mobilized those that engaged in political violence. In the old Anambra State of the South Eastern part of the country, for instance, youth groups such as *Ikemba Front* and *Jim Vanguard* existed as the military apparatus of political candidates. Their violent clashes, such as the one that occurred at Nkpor, Anambra state, actually depicted war situations that created trauma in the minds of citizens. Indeed, the politics of the period lacked democratic content and the youths were socialized in that regard.

As the military took effective control of political power once again (between 1983 and 1999), there were struggles for a return to democratic rule emanating from the civil society. Youths, especially the educated ones, took active part in this struggle. University students (under the auspices of the Students' Union Government) took active part in the struggles. By the time the country returned to civilian rule in 1999, it was clear that the dictatorial

tendency of the military era had infiltrated the civil society and this contributed largely in shaping and defining the character of the democratic process under Nigeria's Fourth Republic. For instance, the general view in the country is that the military (or the power brokers) decided to concede the presidential slot to the West in order to assuage them for the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election that was widely believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola (a westerner), who eventually died in the process of trying to reclaim his mandate. It was based on this concession that contestants from the other sections of the country (North, South, and East) were effectively edged out from the primaries of the political parties thereby leaving the final presidential battle for the westerners. Thus, Olusegun Obasanjo and OluFala (both westerners) emerged as the two contenders. Again, it is discernible that the major contestants thrown up by the power brokers were the old horses. As it seemed, the youths were not given due consideration in terms of being allowed to take up leadership roles.

The seeming neglect of the youths or the inability of the youths to participate in elective or appointive positions is manifest in the Fourth Republic. This explains why the political landscape has been dominated mainly by the 'old school'. In most cases, the youths that emerge into the political scene include those that were adopted or anointed by the 'old school' politicians. Interestingly, the youths appear to have accepted the situation as normal and have refused to use their number to make positive political statement. Those in active politics expect to be 'anointed' by the older politicians before setting out to actualise their dreams. In terms of voting, the youths tend to queue behind the candidates anointed by the older politicians.

South-East Youths and the Nigeria's 2019 General Elections: A Post-Mortem

The South east youths are not insulated from the challenges confronting the Nigerian youths generally. They are not spared from the seeming neglect and manipulations by the elite, which have grossly affected the level and nature of their political participation. They are part and parcel of the masses that the elite hold in contempt, which is understandable from the elite theoretical standpoint. Added to these, there are even some peculiarities associated with the south east in terms of political engagement.

There are certain views shared widely within the country about the people of the South East who are dominantly Igbo. It is widely believed that the Igbo people are highly business-minded individuals who are particularly in love with money and could go to any extent in pursuit of it. They are believed to be impatient while running after money and cannot afford to waste time on anything that is not likely to yield immediate financial benefits. Many a great number of people from the other parts of the country equally nurse the belief that they lack unity, lack political deftness and always find it difficult to organise and present a common front within the Nigerian polity.

Though these are wide generalizations that are susceptible to certain degree of fallacies, the attitude of many a great number of Igbo people tend to justify some of these beliefs. It is a truism that competition within the people of south east is no longer about ideas but about money and ostentatious display of wealth. To say the least, some of these attributes manifest in the political life of south easterners. Going by the classifications of Almond; Powell, Jr.; Strom; and Dalton (2004), the dominant culture within the south east zone appears to fall within the Subject and Parochial order. That is to say, there are a great

number of people who passively obey government officials/law but do not vote or engage actively in politics, as well as those who are hardly aware of government and politics or simply those who ignore politics and its impact on their lives. There is by far lesser number of people who are highly politically informed and make electoral choices or give support to the leader based on performance. A leader who shares money during the elections is likely to be re-elected even if s/he had performed abysmally in his position.

It is not uncommon to see a large number of youths in the south east that do not possess Voter’s card based on the simple reason that the registration period clashed with the time for their business. It is not uncommon to hear youths from the region saying that they do not want to participate in the voting process because the politicians or government functionaries do not have any influence on their lives, especially since they (politicians) do not provide food for them (the youths). Left to choose between going for a private business and going to cast vote on an election day, majority of youths from the zone are most likely to choose the former. The latter option can only be considered by such people if there are chances that money would be shared at the polling station and it has to be an amount far higher than what they would make at their business centre. This is evident from what usually happens during rerun elections when the restriction placed on movement is not total. Conditioned by this mindset, the south east usually records an abysmal number of votes compared to the total number of registered voters. Available records (Egbas, 2019; *Premium Times*, 2019), as depicted in the table below, show the discrepancy between the total number of registered voters and the number of accredited voters within the zone during the 2019 Presidential elections.

Table 1:1. THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS AND NUMBER OF ACCREDITED VOTERS IN THE SOUTH-EAST STATES DURING THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

S/N	STATE	Registered Voters	Accredited Voters
1	ABIA	1,932,892	361,561
2	ANAMBRA	2,447,996	675,273
3	EBONYI	1,459,933	391,747
4	ENUGU	1,944,016	452,765
5	IMO	2,272,293	585,741
	GRAND TOTAL	10,057,130	2,467,087

Sources: Egbas, 2019; *Premium Times*, 2019.

In fact, it is not out of place to say that the majority of those participating in the elections do so when they can make business out of the election. That is, they do so based on immediate financial benefits accruable from participation. The major motivating factor for the majority of those that vote is money being shared by candidates (vote-buying) and not necessarily the desire to perform one’s civic duty. This explains the basis of the general saying that has almost become a guiding principle for making electoral choices, which goes thus: *Onyekpuigukaewun’eso* (The goat goes after the person with palm fronds). In essence, most of the youths engage in political duties because of the immediate financial benefits.

With regard to political participation, this state of affairs was further compounded by some of the events that played out prior to the 2019 general elections. The issue of

marginalization has always occupied the centre stage in Nigeria's political space. It is quite noticeable, however, that the complaints about marginalization usually resonate from sections of the country other than where the political leader comes from, or from sections that feel unrepresented in the appointment of government functionaries. More often than not, the basic yardstick Nigerians rely on to measure political marginalisation/inclusion is political appointments. Though this issue of marginalization, especially from the point of sharing political offices, is a political gimmick played by the elite, it has sunk in the minds of the people. It is undeniable that the echoes of separatist agitations resonating from the different sections of the country are rooted in the issue of (real or perceived) marginalization (Odum, 2018).

With regard to the south east, it should be recalled that the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which drew its membership mainly from the youths, was formed in 1999. It was the belief of most people from the south east that the defeat of Chief Dr. Alex Ekwueme by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (who eventually emerged as the President in 1999) in the Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) Jos Convention/presidential primaries was a grand plan by the power brokers to forestall the emergence of a Nigerian President from the south eastern extraction. Whether true or otherwise, the fact remains that many Igbo people felt short-changed when it became clear that the South East could no longer produce the president in 1999 vis-a-vis what transpired at the PDP Jos Convention. Anchoring its arguments on the issue of marginalization, MASSOB began to make demands for the actualization of the sovereign State of Biafra and actually engaged in showdown with the Nigerian government. In 2006, for instance, the group made attempts to disrupt the national census exercise within the South East zone in their bid to press their case for a State of Biafra, insisting that people within the area designated as Biafra should not be enumerated as part of the Nigerian population. Eventually, the intensity with which the group had made her demands for separatism decreased when Goodluck Jonathan assumed power as the Nigerian president.

Based on the accusations levelled against the leader of MASSOB by some members, claiming that he abandoned the course of the Movement and started romancing with (Nigerian) politicians, the group suffered internal crisis that eventually resulted in the emergence of splinter groups such as the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). However, none of the groups generated heat with regard to separatist agitation while the incumbency of Goodluck Jonathan lasted. The reason for this is not farfetched. It rests on the fact that a considerable number of Igbo people gained strategic federal appointments/positions and as such felt accommodated within his government.

Noise over the issue of marginalization and agitations for the State of Biafra resurged in a more vociferous manner with the emergence of MuhammaduBuhari as the President of Nigeria. This time, IPOB emerged as the group that dominated the scene in terms of separatist agitation. As usual, the group drew its membership mainly from the youths. Prior to the 2019 general elections, the group had started demanding for referendum in order to actualise the Sovereign State of Biafra, urging her members not to participate in any election conducted by the Nigerian government other than the referendum (*Vanguard*, 2017). They demonstrated this during the 2017 gubernatorial election that took place in

Anambra – one of the states in the South East– by adopting the catchword: No referendum, no election! When they realised that their threats and attempts to scuttle the election had failed and that the election would hold after all, they declared a sit-at-home on the day of the Election in protest and to boycott the election (Adio, 2017; Emewu, 2017; Chukwu, 2017). Most of their members complied with the order and shunned the election. Viewed from the standpoint of the Democratic Consent theory, it is apparent that this position they took is not only injurious but also a self-inflicted one.

As the 2019 general election drew closer, the group continued with its campaign of: “No referendum, no election”. The leader of the group urged the members not to participate in the electoral process. Again, a great number of youths parading as members of IPOB complied with his instructions by refusing to participate in the Voters registration exercise. Some that had already gotten their Voters Card destroyed them. Few days to the election, however, the leader of the group issued another directive, urging members to vote in the election (Ogbonna, 2019; Onyeji, 2019). Though it was not explicitly stated, the general belief was that the directive came in view of the fact that the major opposition party fielded a south easterner as a vice presidential candidate. Thus, the group decided to help the opposition party secure victory over the ruling party that was seen as being totally anti-Igbo in terms of political appointments. By and large, the directive came rather too late because most IPOB members were not eligible to vote having failed to procure voters cards. Acting under the aegis of IPOB, therefore, a great number of youths denied themselves the opportunity of participating in the electoral process and, by so doing, lost the chance of participating in electing those that would continue to make impact on their lives.

Apart from those that did not participate in the election on grounds of separatist agitation, there were those that stayed away simply because they do not have interest in the electoral process. Casual interaction with some of the youths that do not have voters card revealed that most of them did not register as voters because they considered the process of registration quite tiresome. There were equally those that could not vote because they found themselves in a state of self-incapacitation. They include those that registered for the sake of convenience in areas close to their businesses, offices, or school and not necessarily for the purpose of making use of the cards on the days of election. Though such people have their Voters cards, it was impossible for them to access their polling stations because their registration centres/polling stations were very far away from their residential homes. There was this case of a politician who offered to convey some university students to the venue of Voters Registration exercise located within his constituency and pay them certain amount for them to register there. Those willing to abandon their cards to him after the registration were offered higher amount. Surprisingly, many subscribed to this arrangement.

Generally speaking, the south east records a high number of youths that are either apolitical or with a warped sense of political participation because they are not politically informed and do not seek to be politically informed. These youths can afford to refrain from participating in political activities on flimsy reasons. They would prefer to watch football matches and movies instead of watching a political debate taking place between those contesting for political positions. They would expect to be bribed in order to vote

during state-related elections but can afford to pay in order to vote in a Reality TV show. They can memorize the names of Housemates in the *Big Brother Nigeria Show* but may not know the participants in the political race within their community. Most of the youths from the south east that show interest in politics appear more like 'online political tigers' than practical participants. Undoubtedly, majority of the youths in the south east lack the necessary political awareness to guide them towards making informed political participation. They do not understand the impact of politics and political decisions on their lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As manifested in the 2019 general elections, the political participation of youths in the south east leaves much to be desired. There are strong indications that majority of them do not appreciate the essence of meaningful political participation; they do not understand the implication of their political (in)actions. While they complain about unemployment, poor infrastructure, corruption of political leaders, and poor governance generally, they lack the will to challenge these ills and elect quality leaders. During elections, they prefer to sell their votes to wealthy (even if crooked) politicians and then turn around to complain about the same ills after such individuals must have assumed offices. As such, they refuse to do the needful during elections only to turn around afterwards to join the band of those complaining about the emergence of poor leaders. For instance, the bulk of the youths that claim IPOB membership refused to take active participation during the 2019 elections on the grounds that they were demanding for referendum. In making this demand they failed to realise that they stand a better opportunity of actualising their dreams by electing the right people (or Biafra-minded individuals) into power within the south east zone. As such, it never occurred to them that good leadership 'at home' would help in pressing for their demands at the national level. Blinded by the marginalization narrative and related generalizations crafted by the mischievous politicians, they tend to ignore the fact that some of the problems facing the zone can actually be solved at the state and local government levels.

For instance, it is quite instructive that the IPOB members canvassed for a boycott prior to the 2019 general elections. Surprisingly, the group claimed responsibility of the 'New Yam Festival' incident that occurred in Germany involving the former Deputy Senate President (DSP) whereupon some Igbo youths attacked him. Judging from what they claimed, it would appear that they were demanding the accountability of political office holders. However, it is difficult to reconcile how those who refused to participate in the electoral process that produced the political office holders suddenly began advocating for their accountability. If only they had participated actively in the political process, perhaps, the 'wrong' candidates would not have emerged.

In conclusion, it can be seen that many a great number of youths in the South East did not engage in active political participation during the 2019 general elections. For those that participated, certain factors like money politics and bandwagon mentality guided them in making political choices rather than being guided by their conscience or performance of the contestants. Generally, the youths lack political education and understanding to guide them in their political decisions.

It is therefore recommended that the youths should be engaged in guided political education. The politicians from the South East zone that are apparently in a position to understand the strength of number in a democratic process should drop their political differences and join hands to facilitate this education and political mobilization, which should not necessarily be along party lines. Besides, there is need for the political office holders to demonstrate good representation and qualitative service delivery in order to gain credibility and make positive influence on the people.

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