

# Electoral Reform: Bridging the Gap for Youth Inclusion in Nigeria

## ABSTRACT

Youth participation in Nigeria's electoral process has been historically limited, despite young people constituting a significant portion of the population. This paper examines the challenges hindering youth inclusion in Nigeria's electoral system and proposes strategic reforms to enhance their engagement. By analyzing existing literature, policy frameworks, and case studies, the paper highlights the importance of youth participation for democratic consolidation and offers recommendations for redefining the electoral process to bridge the gap for youth inclusion.

## Introduction

Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," boasts a youthful population, with approximately 70% under the age of 30. Despite this demographic advantage, youth participation in the electoral process remains disproportionately low. The exclusion of young people from political decision-making processes poses a threat to the nation's democratic development and stability. This paper seeks to explore the factors contributing to this exclusion and to propose strategies for effective youth inclusion through electoral reforms.

The Importance of Youth Inclusion in Electoral Processes Youth inclusion in electoral processes is vital for several reasons:

- **Democratic Representation:** A democracy thrives when all segments of society are adequately represented. Excluding youth undermines the representativeness of democratic institutions.
- **Innovation and Change:** Young people bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to political challenges, driving societal progress.
- **Preventing Political Apathy:** Inclusive electoral processes encourage political engagement among youth, reducing apathy and potential disenchantment with the political system.

## Historical Context of Youth Participation in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Historically, Nigerian youth have been marginalized in political processes due to factors such as colonial legacies, military rule, and entrenched gerontocracy.

The *"Not Too Young To Run"* movement, which led to the constitutional amendment in 2018 lowering the age requirements for political office, marked a significant milestone in advocating for youth inclusion.

However, systemic challenges persist, hindering meaningful youth participation.

## Challenges Hindering Youth Inclusion in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Several factors contribute to the limited participation of youth in Nigeria's electoral process:

- 1 Socio-Economic Barriers:** High levels of unemployment and poverty among youth limit their capacity to engage in politics, which often requires substantial financial resources.
- 2 Political Violence and Intimidation:** The prevalence of electoral violence deters young people from participating in the political process.
- 3 Cultural and Societal Norms:** Traditional norms often relegate youth to subordinate roles, undermining their political aspirations.
- 4 Lack of Political Education:** Insufficient civic education results in a lack of awareness about political rights and processes among youth.
- 5 Systemic Corruption:** Corruption within political parties and electoral bodies erodes trust and discourages youth participation.

## Existing Electoral Reforms and Their Impact on Youth Inclusion

Various reforms have been implemented to enhance electoral integrity and inclusivity in Nigeria:

### Electoral Act Amendments

Amendments aimed at improving the electoral process have been enacted, but their impact on youth inclusion has been limited due to inadequate implementation and enforcement.

### Youth-Focused Initiatives

Programs such as the "Youth Vote Count" campaign have sought to mobilize young voters, with varying degrees of success.

## Comparative Analysis: Youth Inclusion in Electoral Processes in Other African Countries

Examining youth participation in other African nations provides valuable insights



### South Africa

Despite progressive policies, youth voter turnout remains low, indicating that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without active engagement strategies.



### Kenya

Youth have been instrumental in political mobilization, yet face challenges similar to Nigeria, including economic barriers and political patronage systems.

## Strategies for Redefining the Electoral Process to Enhance Youth Inclusion

To bridge the gap for youth inclusion, a multifaceted approach is necessary:

- **Comprehensive Civic Education:** Implement nationwide civic education programs to raise political awareness and literacy among youth.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Develop initiatives that address youth unemployment and poverty, enabling greater political engagement.
- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Enforce existing laws that promote youth participation and introduce new legislation to remove remaining barriers.
- **Promoting Youth-Friendly Political Parties:** Encourage political parties to adopt inclusive policies that facilitate youth candidacy and participation.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Utilize digital platforms to engage youth in the electoral process, including online voter registration and education campaigns.

## Case Studies of Successful Youth Inclusion in Nigeria

Highlighting successful instances of youth participation can serve as models for future efforts:

- **Not Too Young To Run Movement:** A grassroots campaign that successfully advocated for constitutional amendments lowering the age requirements for political office.
- **Youth-Led Political Parties:** Emergence of youth-led parties that have gained traction in local elections, demonstrating the potential for youth-driven political change.



## The Role of Civil Society and International Organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and international bodies play a crucial role in promoting youth inclusion.



### Advocacy and Awareness

CSOs can lead campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of youth participation.



### Capacity Building

Provide training and resources to equip youth with the skills necessary for effective political engagement.



### Monitoring and Evaluation

Oversee the implementation of electoral reforms to ensure they effectively promote youth inclusion.

## Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A. Institutionalize Youth Quotas:** Mandate a minimum percentage of youth candidates in political parties and elective positions.
- B. Enhance Electoral Transparency:** Implement measures to reduce corruption and increase transparency in the electoral process.



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