

Assessment of *The Not Too Young to Run Law* on Youth Political Participation in Gombe State

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Abstract

The purpose of study is to assess whether the "Not Too Young to Run Law" in Nigeria influences level of youth political participation in Gombe State. From this survey conducted with 400 respondents in Gombe Central, the study revealed that the legislation has opened an avenue for youth involvement in politics and reduced barriers to entry into politics by young candidates. However, despite this advancement, the study identified challenges such as socioeconomic, financial constraints, imbalance mentoring, party politics and cultural issues as effective hindrances to youth participation. The study concluded that while the law has created more opportunities for youth, the identified challenges must be addressed for sustaining and expanding youth engagement in political activities. It recommended the need for targeted interventions to support young aspirants, media houses and political parties to educate voters, among others, to ensure the continued success of youth in politics.

Keywords: Youth, Political Participation, Not Too Young To Run, voters, Democracy, Political Parties, Gombe State & Nigeria.

Introduction

Deeper concern from and by individuals, other national and international organizations on the geometrical increase of youth across the globe without tangible sociopolitical and economic participation and productivity prompted the "Not Too Young to Run Campaign". This is based on observations that the current generation has a great number of young people

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in the world's history, with half of the global population being under 25 years old, and one-fifth falling between ages 15 and 25; and the youth representation in government and politics remains significantly low, due to the legal age requirements for candidacy. Consequently, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), in partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), launched the global "Not Too Young to Run" (NTYTR) campaign. This campaign initiated in November 2016 and was launched at the inaugural United Nations Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law; with the theme "Expanding the Democratic Space: The Role of Youth in Public Decision-Making." The event brought together young individuals and decision-makers to engage in discussions about ideas, challenges, best practices, and recommendations related to promoting the rights of young aspiring politicians. It also introduced the NTYTR campaign, outlined its objectives, unveiled the campaign website, and made a compelling case for young people running for public office while highlighting the various obstacles they encounter globally.

The initiative, which is beyond specific country-level laws and regulations, aimed to:

- a) Increase awareness about the status of youth in public office by creating a knowledge platform containing global statistics on youth involvement in politics and the obstacles they face in each country.
- b) Advocate for the rights of young people seeking public office and leadership positions, as well as for greater youth participation in political and governmental processes.
- c) Solicit input and ideas from young individuals worldwide regarding their participation in political decision-making through online public consultations.

As an indication of their commitments, there were international attempts and advocacy for a reduction in the legal age for candidacy in England, Wales, and Scotland in 2007. Such

campaign led to the lowering of the candidacy age from 21 to 18; aligning it with the voting age. In Turkey, there was successful lobbying to reduce the age for parliamentary candidacy from 30 to 25 in 2006. Considering the above attempts, Okoh (2022), described the "Not Too Young to Run" campaign as an open-source global initiative designed to raise awareness about the rights of young individuals seeking political positions.

One of the benefits of democracy is that it allows or makes way for the citizens to participate in choosing their leaders at all levels, hence nobody should be disenfranchised unjustly. Consequently, the "Not Too Young to Run" campaign/movement was embraced in Nigeria. The campaign was seen as a potent force to dismantle the legendary obstacles inhibiting youth active participation in politics and governance. The movement was seen to inspire the active participation of young people in political systems, due to the legislative changes which lower age requirements in favour of the youth. Consequently, presidential assent to the bill in Nigeria on 31st May 2018 was well received by the youths in all the thirty-six states, as a milestone in the struggle for political participation by all gender and age groups. In Gombe State in particular, the youth were jubilant and many of them seem ready to actively engage in the state's political landscape unhindered as noted by Adamu (2020).

Statement of the Problem

Since the return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, the older generation seems to have occupied most of the political position in the country at large and Gombe state. The younger generations therefore seem to be politically marginalized.

Many youths in Gombe State are mostly used as political vanguards, hooligans or thugs by most of the older politicians. The youth are temporally employed and empowered by the older politicians as one could see them carrying dangerous weapons and influenced by drugs

escorting politicians or attacking political opponents of their 'political godfather'. Under such unfortunate circumstances, many youths have lost their lives.

Similarly, there seems to be few youths in the state aspiring for governorship, state assembly or local government chairman position. Could it be that the Not Too Young To Run Law is not well understood by the youth? Was the law not well domesticated? Are the youth not well informed of the new law? Are the youths afraid to venture into politics, or are there other challenges? Finding scientific answers to these fundamental questions and other impediments prompted this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of the "Not Too Young to Run" Law in enhancing youth participation in Gombe State politics. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Find out if the youth are aware of the Not Too Young to Run Law in Gombe State
- ii. To assess the impact of the "Not Too Young to Run" Law on youth participation in Gombe State politics.
- iii. To identify other challenges faced by young individuals in aspiring to run for political office in the Gombe State.

Research Questions

- i. Are the youth in Gombe aware of the Not Too Young to Run Law in Nigeria?
- ii. How does the "Not Too Young to Run" Law in Nigeria assist/encourage youth participation in Gombe State politics?
- iii. What are the common challenges that young individuals encounter when aspiring to run for political office in Gombe State?

Hypothesis

- i. The implementation of the "Not Too Young to Run" Law has not significantly increased youth participation in Gombe State politics.
- ii. There might be challenges faced by young individuals aspiring to run for political office in Gombe State, despite the implementation of the "Not Too Young to Run" Law.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Democracy

Democracy is a word and a concept, which is open to various interpretations in modern political system. Politicians across the political spectrum, from the far left to the far right, often assert that their preferred form of governance aligns with democratic principles (Adebayo, 2009). However, Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy as "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" is widely accepted. Hence, one can describe democracy as a government that operates with the input or consent of the government. It is people base, oriented and driven. Democracy is a system that aims to achieve a commonly accepted public good through collaborative deliberation and decision-making on policy matters related to public affairs. It delegates authority to agents who implement the broad decisions made by most of the people through voting.

Democracy is believed to have begun in the Greek City States several centuries ago, but has now developed and numerous dynamics and complex issues have crept in. It is important to note that even in Greek democracy, not all adult population enjoyed full citizenship rights. This meant they couldn't participate in politics, whether by attending Sovereign Assembly meetings or holding public offices. Children, women and insane or not loyal adults and slaves were among those denied right to vote and be voted for. Jean-Jacques Rousseau

(1712-1778), a French social and political thinker, was among the first to question the basis of this system. John Stuart Mill, a British philosopher advocated for extending voting rights to the property-owning class. The emergence of modern states meant that individuals had to give up some of their rights and privileges as states had the authority to compel obedience and loyalty from their citizens. While citizens in modern states can express their opinions, they must still adhere to the rules set by their leaders (Adebayo, 2009).

Types and Features of Democracy

Suberu (2008) described two forms of modern democracy such as: Direct democracy where all people actively participate and Indirect Democracy, where there are representative of the people or people elect those to represent them due to largeness of land, populations, etc. Manzer (2005), on his part, outlined some features of democracy to include: a scheduled and recurring elections time; the affirmation of the rule of law within the constitution and its adherence; governance by majority rule in the nation; recognition and protection of the rights of minority groups; equal treatment under the law; assurance of fundamental human rights; the presence of a party system; an efficient mechanism for changing the government; adherence to the principles of the separation of powers and freedom of the press. These are vital in contemporary democratic system as also noted by Riker (2007).

Political Participation

Political participation emanates from conducive atmosphere that guarantee and sustain freedoms of speech, assembly and association. These are vital as they would enable individuals to engage in public affairs, register as candidates, campaign, get elected, and hold positions in government at all levels. According to international standards, both men and women possess an equal right to participate fully in every aspect of the political process (Patterson, 2002).

Political participation can be said to be a voluntary activity through which members of a society participate in selecting leaders and play a direct or indirect role in shaping public policies. On his part, Lam (2003), sees political participation as broader in nature and scope. It goes beyond government and politics, but encompasses lawful or unlawful actions aimed at supporting, making demands, engaging in debates, and other forms of verbal or media-based expressions directed at both governments and society as a whole. These activities also extend to private institutions like universities and businesses, challenging existing rules and norms. He opined that political participation should not be narrowly confined to government-related matters. Corroborating, Burns, et al. (2001), sees political participation as encompassing various forms of activities with the intent or consequence of influencing government actions, whether directly by impacting public policy formulation or implementation, or indirectly by affecting the selection of public officials.

Political participation refers to the process by which citizens engage directly or indirectly in the governance of the state or society. This involvement can take various forms, such as voting in elections, participating in campaigns, actively contributing to policy-making, implementation, and interpretation, joining political parties or interest groups, and offering opinions or analyses on societal political developments. Political participation can be grouped into conventional (active, functional, within a known system) participation that are normal and rationally justifiable and unconventional (apathy, passive) participation, below, natural and odd participation.

It is in the light of the foregoing that this study evaluated/assessed the level of youth political participation in Gombe State politics. Gombe as a State in Northeast Nigeria, with eleven local government areas, was created in October 1996 by the administration of General Sani Abacha. Hamidu (2024), noted that the state has numerous mineral deposits, agriculture and businesses are the mainstay of its economy. Alhaji (2001), on his part stated that Gombe State

has multiple and diverse ethno-religious groups and have experienced democratic rules by and from different political parties since its creation. These made the youth to have experienced different political activities and system (Adegbulu, 2011 and Ogundele & Ayoola, 2012).

Research Techniques, Sample Size and Method of Data Analysis

To determine the respondent, the study adopted multi-stage cluster sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Akko, Gombe and Yamaltu-Deba Local Government Areas, which made up Gombe Central Senatorial zone, with 407,562 2023 registered voters for the 2023 elections, were divided into clusters at wards level, in line with Osuala, (2005) suggestion. 400 respondents were randomly sampled from the clustered wards, using the formula of Taro Yamane, in determining the sample size at 0.05: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$. The structured questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. The data obtained via the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using simple percentage.

Data Presentation and Analysis/Discussion

The data obtained from this survey are hereby presented on tabular forms for easy understanding and interpretation, using simple percentage.

Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency Response	Percentage (%)
Male	220	55%
Female	180	45%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, 2024.

In Gombe Central, like any other part of the country have male and female as indigenes and citizens. Each of them has political and electoral freedom to participate and the government have obligation on and to them. Hence, none of the gender was left out in this study. The data above indicated a fairly balanced gender distribution among respondents, with 55% male and 45% female participants. The reason for the slight differences was female gender were not easily available due to socio-cultural and religious reasons to attend to all issues at certain time, especially in public. So, during the sample, only those who were seen and who agreed were sampled.

Age Distribution of the Respondents

Age	Frequency of Response	Percentage (%)
18-25	120	30%
26-35	150	37.5%
36-45	90	22.5%
46 years and above	40	10%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Everybody, both the aged and the youth are vital in and to this study. Hence, each of them was sampled as seen in the table above. The majority of respondents were between 18-25, were 30%. 26-35 years old, were 37%. Putting the two together means, 67.5% were youth. While, 36-45 and 46 and above were, 22.5% and 10% respectively. Adding them together make it 32.5%. This was because the youth were more in number and can easily be seen on the street without too much protocol, unlike the elderly. This is appropriate for the study since it is the youths in this age group that are directly affected by the legislation. Their

responses are therefore crucial in understanding the effectiveness of the Not Too Young To Run Law.

Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Qualification	Frequency of Response	Percentage (%)
Primary	60	15%
Secondary	140	35%
Tertiary	200	50%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Ability to read and write for all gender and age-group is very essential in contemporary world. The table above showed that 15% of our respondents had primary education; 35% had secondary education and 50% of the respondents had tertiary education. This revealed that 100 % of our respondents were educated to certain level. More importantly, 50%, being the majority had tertiary education, was a good booster and it is not surprising because Gombe State is one of the States in Northeast Nigeria with numerous higher institutions that students within and without the State come to study, due to the relatively peaceful atmosphere. Few examples of tertiary schools include: Gombe State University, Gombe State University of Science and Technology Kumo, Federal University of Kashere, and North-Eastern Univerity, National Open University, Jewel University, etc. Other institutions include, Federal Technical College of Education (Technical), Gombe, State Polytechnic, Bajoga, Federal Polytechnic Kaltungo, College of Education Billiri, School of Nursing and Midwifery Gombe, and many others. These enable the youth to have access to western education in Gombe and aware of politics and governance (Fagge, 2005).

Youth being Aware of *The Not Too Young to Run Law* in Gombe State or Not

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	170	42.5%
Agree	160	40%
Disagree	50	12.5%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table above revealed that 42.5% of our respondents strongly agreed that they were aware of the NTYTR law. Others, 40% of them simply agreed that they were aware of the law. Adding or combining the strongly agreed and agreed together will give us 82.5%. This implied that they were aware of the Not Too Young to Run Law. 12% and 5% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Adding or combining the disagreed and strongly agreed together will give us 17.5%.

From the data above, it is obvious that the youth are not ignorant of the NTYTR movement and the law in the country and in Gombe State in particular. The above confirmed earlier study conducted by Okoh (2022). This is not surprising because of the youth level of literacy and Gombe State also had numerous radio and television stations that air political and other information, like: Gombe Media Corporation (A. M/ F.M and T.V); Amana Radio, Progress Radio, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Federal University of Kashere F.M, etc. These are vital in or for dissemination of information and as agent of political socialization. This suggests that all the and other media outlets have positive impact on the youth in Gombe State.

The Not Too Young to Run Law has encouraged youth participation in politics.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	200	50%
Agree	140	35%
Disagree	40	10%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table above revealed that 50% of our respondents strongly agreed that the law encouraged them to participate in politics and government, while 35% of the respondents agreed. Putting the two together means 85% of the population concur that the "Not Too Young To Run Law" has opened up more opportunities for youth participation in politics. 10 % strongly disagreed while 5 % of respondents strongly disagreed. Putting the two together, it means 15 % of the respondents did not agree that the "Not Too Young to Run Law", opened more opportunities or encouraged the youth to actively participate in Gombe State politics.

Based on the data above, the presidential assent and implementation of the "Not Too Young to Run Law" in Gombe State really created a more enlightenment and served as morale booster for inclusive political environment for young people. Therefore, the youth in Gombe State are physically and materially ready to aspire for public offices and remain active in political activities in Gombe State. Oyedwole, (2020) also corroborated the above in a different study he conducted. Norris (2002) also opined that youth are numerous and can-do great things if given the opportunities. Therefore, having such privilege will not be undermined by them. No wonder the above results showed and confirmed that the new law

has encouraged and boosted youth participation in the country at large; as well as youth in other African states (Bains, 2021).

Challenges preventing young people from engaging in Gombe politics: Financial and Socioeconomic issues

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	190	47.5%
Agree	140	35%
Disagree	50	12.5%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table above revealed that 47.5% of our respondents strongly agreed that they lack economic power/finances and 35% agreed. Putting the two together, it gives us 82.5% of the respondents. 12% and 5%, making it 17% disagreed that socioeconomic/financial challenges affected the youth in aspiring for electoral position.

From the above data, it is confirmed that socio-economic challenges prevent many young people from engaging in politics. This could be seen as many youth lack the financial power and economic strength to meet what political parties need or cost of nomination forms, means to buy gadgets and other logistics for campaigning, opening and maintaining offices and other items needed to make candidates/aspirants stable to aspire political office. Economic hardship, lack of funds, etc. are serious impediment to youth aspirations and could led to youth restiveness in the country as noted by Ayoade (2008), Yakubu (2012) and Adebisi & Oladele (2022). This is a significant barrier that must be addressed to enhance youth political participation.

Challenges preventing young people from engaging in politics: Traditional norms and cultural expectations.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	180	45%
Agree	160	40%
Disagree	40	10%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table above revealed that 45% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were discouraged due to socio-cultural factors, while 40% agreed. Therefore, combining the above figures will give us 85%. By implication, 85% of respondents agreed that traditional and cultural expectations/demands by or from elders, political parties, electorates, and society, etc. discouraged the youth from active political participation despite the signing of *Not Too Young to Run Law*. 10% and 5% respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed.

The results or opinion of the youth above highlighted the influence or power of traditional and cultural factors on political engagement or participation. Ajayi & Ojo, (2024) also agreed that traditional and customary issues are common factors in developing democracy like Nigeria and affected mostly women and the youth.

Challenges preventing young people from engaging in politics: Lack of mentorship and guidance.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	180	45%

Agree	160	40%
Disagree	40	10%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table above revealed 45% strongly agreed, while 40% agreed. Putting them together, we can say that that 85% of respondents agreed that lack of genuine mentorship affected youth political participation in Gombe. 15%, broken into 10% and 5% respectively, disagreed and strongly disagreed, that lack of mentoring hinders/limits youth participation in Gombe State politics. These challenges are anchored on the premise that most of the mentorship is patron-client, master-servant affinity. The elderly hardly mentor and guide the younger ones to be responsible and accountable politicians. And when there are financial supports to the younger ones, it is based on capitalist accumulation or ‘give and take’ basis. This discourages the youth from political participation. The influence of elders on youth political participation is strong issue in politics generally as noted by Andres & Diego (2010). The respondents therefore see lack of good mentorship and guidance as a major challenge for young political aspirants.

Challenges preventing young people from engaging in politics: Struggle to gain trust and credibility among older voters.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	160	40%
Agree	180	45%
Disagree	40	10%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%

Total	400	100%
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Source: *Field Survey, 2024.*

The data above showed that 40% of respondents strongly agreed, while 45% agreed. Putting the two together means 85% of respondents are of the opinion that youth in Gombe politics are facing crucial identity politics challenge. 10 % and 5% on the other hand disagree and strongly disagreed respectively. This means 15% of the respondents did not agree that youth are facing serious challenge to be identified and getting acceptance from the electorates/voters. In the affirmative however, it obvious that young politicians struggle with gaining trust and credibility among older voters, hence, it will affect their aspiration and wining even in the party primaries before confronting some political opponents at the general elections. This is a key challenge for young politicians in Gombe State. Harding (2012) and Hooghe, (2021) noted that political participation for the youth is seriously affected by numerous factors. Breaking such barriers to gain acceptance is definitely not an easy task for the upcoming generation.

Summary of Major findings and Conclusion

The study assessed the efficacy of the *Not Too Young to Run Law* in Gombe State, after being domesticated in Nigeria. Research questions and hypotheses were formulated, and primary sources of data were used, where 400 respondents were randomly selected for the study.

Based on objective one of the research, the data revealed that the youth are actually aware of the Not Too Young to Run Movement and Law and the law has improved their ego to participate in politics. This means the research objective is achieved. On the contrary, however, our hypothesis one which stated that the implementation of the "Not Too Young to Run Law" has not significantly increased youth participation in Gombe State, is not true.

In other words, the assenting to the Law has significant impact on youth participation in politics and governance in Gombe State.

On objective two, the study found out that the *Not Too Young To Run Law* made impact on youth participation in Gombe State politics. This was corroborated by some young men aspiring for political positions at the state legislature and local government elections in 2023 and 2024 respectively. It is therefore a good and encouraging step which if consolidated and well supported by the youth and political parties, the youth will in no distant time be fully participating in politics.

On research objective three, the study clearly showed that despite the *Not Too Young To Run Law*, the youth are faced or confronted with numerous challenges militating against their active political participation and aspiring for elective positions in Gombe State. This therefore connotes that signing and domesticating the Law is not the only issue affecting youth in politics, but there is other pyramid of traditional, sociological, financial, among other factors, within and around the political party and society that are also critical. Similarly, the data gathered confirmed our second hypotheses that there are other tangible factors affecting youth participation in politics aside the legislative booster the youth had in the Not Too young To Run Law. These challenges faced by young individuals affected or limited the youth aspiring to run for political office in Gombe State, despite the implementation of the *Not Too Young to Run Law*.

This study therefore concludes that *Not Too Young to Run Law* is actually a good effort, an attempt to help the youth to be aware of their political rights and to participate actively; by breaking the legendary age barrier/ embargo on the active youth political participation. However, financial demands, lack of good mentorship and other party and societal demands

are very crucial inhibiting factors that must be addressed adequately if the new law should help the youth more practically in Gombe State politics and governance.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the under listed recommendations are crucial to enhance youth participation in politics:

1. Political parties should make concession for the youth in all ramifications in terms of money to buy forms and other financial demands. This will encourage them to actively participate.
2. There should be a concerted effort to improve political education and awareness among young people to continue to play vital role in politics of Gombe State. This will enhance their efficiency, productivity and to make positive impact on politics.
3. The youth should be industrious to get something doing and get more finances to meet their political needs. Parties and other well-meaning support groups can give or create financial support mechanisms to assist numerous promising young political candidates.
4. Families, individuals and community should support the younger political aspirants who have good intension and idea for the progress of the society. In other words, community-based initiative and support programmes can be developed and sustained to boost the youth politically.

5. There should be massive reorientation and education of the larger population, using all channels/means of communication to address and dismantle traditional and socio-cultural issues affecting youth and women political participation in northern Nigeria and particularly Gombe State. Strong advocacy and awareness campaigns can help shift these thoughts, cultures and phobia. Therefore, the youth, political parties, government and non-governmental agencies and media out let's should be proactive in this direction.

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