

## **Youth, Political Parties, and Peace-Building Process in Nigeria**

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjpsa.2013/vol11n33142>

Published: September 7, 2023

**Citation:** Raji A.B., Adedayo A.M. and Ibitoye M.O. (2023) Youth, Political Parties, and Peace-Building Process in Nigeria, *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, Vol.11, No.3, pp.31-42

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Nigerian Youth cannot be ruled out in the study of active contribution to the Nigerian political system, national stability, cohesion, and development, due to their orientation, attitude, and reactions to national issues. Political parties are the avenue for electing representatives of the people and to this effect, the Nigerian Youth have been trying to take a meaningful hold of the Nigerian parties by trying to be major political gladiators. Premised on this background, this paper is set to discuss the conceptual meaning of youth, political parties, and peacebuilding. In the same vein, it will establish the connection and relationship between youth partisanship and peacebuilding in Nigeria. Moreover, the study seeks to examine the pivotal roles the Nigerian youth play in enhancing peacebuilding and national stability as members of political parties in Nigeria, whilst also attempting to determine to what extent the youth have been contributing to conflicts and peace-building in Nigeria. The data for this study were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through the Interview with Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Direct Observation (DO), and participant observation. In addition, youth organizations, amongst others, were interviewed. The secondary sources include books, journal articles, periodicals, magazines, and other publications relevant to the study. The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The peace-building theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The findings of the study revealed that the Nigerian Youth, in these contemporary times, have been actively involved in partisan politics and that a significant correlation between Youth participation in politics and the peacebuilding process in Nigeria is well established. Now that the youth have been brought into political parties for more participation in the civic roles that they have been excluded from in the time past, there is a need for initiating programs and policies to better understand the roles of youth in political parties and the peace-building process. The study recommends that the Nigerian youth be properly enlightened and adequately equipped in peace and peace-building processes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Political Parties, Peacebuilding, Community Development, National Stability.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Youth cannot be ruled out in the study of active contribution to the Nigerian political system, national stability, cohesion, and development regarding their orientation, attitude, and reactions to national issues. Thus, the role of the youth in the peacebuilding process and national development cannot be underrated. The youth are at the wheel of the development of any country. The advancement of a country is determined by how productive and creative the youthful populations are because the youth, in any society, is the engine of growth and development. The youth is the foundation stone to societal renaissance and restoration. Not only does the youthful populace form the bane of societies but they also are repeatedly referred to as leaders of tomorrow. As the most active part of any society, youths are the main determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Ozohu-Sulaiman, 2006).

It is a fact that the youths are the bedrock and backbone of any given society, whether in the past, present, or future, be it the medieval or modern period, the vast resources of the youth are considered the greatest treasure of societal development and advancement. Hence, the youth determine the future of society, and, for any country to succeed, it has to have educated, well-informed and responsible youths. The youths are the indicator of how developed a country is and they determine how fast or slow the economy grows. Suffice it to say that in modern society, the youth are the driving force of sustainable socio-economic and political development. Their involvement in the development plans of a country is non-negotiable. As Gyimah-Brempong & Kimenyi (2013) opine, the youth have the responsibility to correct the mistakes and shortcomings of the previous leaders and completely change the outlook of that particular society. Political parties are the avenue for electing representatives of the people and to this effect, the Nigerian Youth has been trying to take a meaningful hold of the Nigerian parties by trying to be major political gladiators. Political parties are described as political groups officially recognized as part of the electoral process and who support candidates during the electoral process regularly (Sartori, 2016).

Peacebuilding involves a full range of approaches, processes, and stages needed to transform toward more sustainable and peaceful relationships. It consists of a wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation, and social transformation. Peacebuilding is a long-term process that occurs after the violent conflict has slowed down or come to a halt. In a narrower sense, peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of conflict, crises, and violence by addressing the root, background, underlying, remote, and immediate causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation and institution building. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often integral to post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Consequently, the paper discusses the conceptual meaning of youth, political parties, and peacebuilding. The study seeks to identify and examine the connection and relationship between youth partisanship and peacebuilding in Nigeria and the pivotal roles the Nigerian youth play in enhancing peace-building and national stability as members of political parties in Nigeria. In addition, the paper examines various ways the youth have been contributing to conflicts and peace-building in Nigeria

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Youth**

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood. In the African Youths Report 2009 (hereafter, the AYR) (UNECA 2009), “youths” are defined as people between 15 and 39 years of age. That is why as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly about education and employment, because ‘youth’ is often referred to as a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education and finding their first job. “The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States.” In 1995, the world youth population – was defined by the United Nations as the age cohort 15-24 (UNO, 2007).

The concept of youth has been given different interpretations, depending on states, cultures, societies, and a particular age bracket. Youthful age is neither about someone’s physical features, or personal appearance nor necessarily a behavioral pattern that is universally identifiable. Consequently, it is appropriate to adopt a generally conceived notion of youth which thought out its definition from the age bracket point of departure and the conception of Nigeria’s National Youth Policy (2001).

As a result, the United Nations postulates that a person whose age ranges from 15-24 years is a youth. This assertion is in tandem with the definition put forward by other societies where a range of 15-30 or 18-40 years is provided as the baseline description of whom the youth are. The African Youth Charter opined that the “youth or young adults shall refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 33 years” (AYC, 2006). In Nigeria, the National Youth Policy Documents (2001 and 2009) defined the youth as persons of ages between 18-35 years. The definition gives that youth is a person of ages 18-35, who is a citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

#### **Political Parties**

Political parties are bodies or organizations that direct or coordinate candidates to participate and vie for elections. It is common for the member of a party to hold similar ideas about politics and parties may promote specific ideological or policy goals. Political parties have become the main component of the political process of countries of the world. Political parties are collective entities

that systematize competitions for political office (Aldrich, 1995). A political party can just be the group of individuals who run for office under a party label (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004).

Similarly, political parties are the whole machinery and paraphernalia that supports the election of a group of the candidate, including voters and volunteers who make out with a particular political party, the official party body or organization that support the election of that party's candidates (Sarah & Olivia, 2016). According to Anson D. Morse, a political party is a strong and robust body or organization united by common philosophy and principles which "has for its immediate end the development and advancement of the interests and the realization of the ideas of the particular individual or individuals and group or groups which it represents (Morse, 1896).

A political party is a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise political power. Political parties originated in their modern form in Europe and the United States in the 19th century, along with the electoral and parliamentary systems, whose development reflects the evolution of parties. The term party has since come to be applied to all organized groups seeking political power, whether by democratic elections or by revolution.

### **Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding is the process of achieving peace. It entails the approaches, scope of activities, and time frame for achieving peace and peacebuilding. According to Bertram, peacebuilding means a 'process' with a range of activities and stakeholders involved. According to Kofi Annan, peacebuilding is "the various concurrent and integrated actions undertaken at the end of a conflict to strengthen and prevent a recurrence of armed confrontation". Lederach describes peacebuilding as the effort to tackle the underlying structural, relational and cultural root causes of conflict. However, peacebuilding is a holistic and comprehensive process that includes; reconciliation and entire social and structural changes, post-conflict reconstruction; improvement and building of social relations, and provision of aid assistance, while all societies from early history onwards have created mechanisms and institutions to build peace.

According to John Galtung (cited in Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2013) "peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the restoration of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of violence". The major flank of peacebuilding, as Galtung further opines, is that it tries to address the root causes and effects of conflict "through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation". Looking at this definition, one is tempted to ask whether or not the youth have anything to do with peacebuilding because it seems to be a broad-based process that can instantly be mistaken as an exclusive preserve of the state and international actors, mainly supranational organizations.

The institutionalization of peacebuilding surfaced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the process of institutionalized peacebuilding started with The Hague Peace Conference in 1898, followed by the

foundation of the League of Nations, and resulted in the establishment of the United Nations at the end of World War II with the main objective to monitor and support world peace through mediation, facilitation, good offices and arbitration between states. The term “peacebuilding” was first used by Johan Galtung (1969) who sees peace-building as one of the three approaches to peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding.

The term ‘peace building’ came into widespread use after 1992 when Boutros-Ghali, the then United Nations Secretary-General announced his Agenda for Peace (Boutros Ghali, 1992). Since then, the concept has enjoyed widespread acceptance and usage among scholars, peace practitioners, development workers, international organizations, and so on. Creating an environment conducive to peace takes various dimensions. These dimensions rely on different peacebuilding initiatives, techniques, and strategies such as structural, gender-based, and indigenous knowledge-based dimensions.

Peacebuilding covers action which supports political, economic, and social structures aiming to strengthen and solidify settlements to redress the causes of conflict. This includes mechanisms to identify and support structures that tend to consolidate peace, advance a sense of confidence and well-being and support economic reconstruction. It also refers to a strategy that tries to avoid conflicts through measures of an attitudinal, socio-economic and political nature. Peacebuilding strategies involve greater inter-party contact. Peace-building tries to build bridges between people through contact and forgiveness; contact and the pursuit of super-ordinate goals; contact and confidence building; and contact and education for mutual understanding (Schroange, (2015).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Youths and Political Parties Participation in Nigeria**

Since the inception of the Nigeria Fourth Republic in 1999, the stakeholders in Nigeria politics across the Western, Northern, Southern, and Eastern regions of Nigeria are finding a means to realize and execute the structures or institutional democratic noninterventionist government (Jackson, 2015). This led to renewed debates regarding the extent to which political involvement and engagement are imperative for an effective working democratic government system (Andrews & Buser, 2013).

In Nigeria, records show that 60 percent of the country’s population is youth. It is appropriate, only logical, and especially when viewed from the perspective of its bustling energy as aforementioned, that such a group would be useful in the peacebuilding process.

In Nigeria, the youth have been playing crucial roles in the peace-building process and procedure from time immemorial. They were active during the anti-colonial struggle. Some of them formed the famous Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), and the Zikist Youth Movement and were well-

known in trade unions and other nationalist political parties of the period. Others were active journalists and writers in the patriotic newspapers during the anti-colonial struggle.

In the 60s and up to the 70s, the young adult was at the center of governance in Nigeria. At age 19, late Ambassador M.T. Mbu was Nigeria's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and he was Minister of Navy at 20 years old. In his early 30s, Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo was a leader in the Western Region of Nigeria and he was the leader of Government in the West before 40 years as well as the late Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ladoke Akintola. In addition, Gowon, Murtala Muhammed, and Olusegun Obasanjo were Heads of State in their 30s. Their age mates populated the civil service as super permanent secretaries while the Military Governors ranged between 20 to early 30s of age. (Adamu, 2003). From the foregoing, it is noticed that the importance of the youth in politics, governance, and national development cannot be underrated as countries that develop and positively make use of their youth are usually more developed.

### **Youth and Peace Building in Nigeria**

Undeniably, the role of youth in peacebuilding predates modern Nigeria and the epoch of the erstwhile colonial rule. In pre-colonial societies not only youth groups were identified as a credible institution in the resolution of conflicts but also served as an epitome of peace and a promising social group for the internalization of a culture of peace. Spaces were created for youth by elders at various levels of community participation for the resolution of inter and intra-community disputes and feuds, family, individual, and peer group sour relationships that could lead to physical confrontation and open violence.

However, the pre-colonial system formed sources of peace-building processes such as the representation of age grades in conflict mediation, village square meetings of peer groups, and youth engagement in socially productive activities and relations that take their energies away from idleness and the temptation of materialism were profoundly affected by new social and economic relations imposed by the colonial state.

Furthermore, the colonial structure of exploitative social and economic relations not only disarticulated the minds of the youth and forced them to resort to whatever comes their way for a living, but also transformed their identity from the nucleus of industrious and creative resources to the first generation of the urban working class. Their influences in peacebuilding were shut out; yet they remained resolute not to be gagged in their struggle to end colonialism, which in most cases were occasioned by revolts, with consequences on their lives (Jega, 2017). The hitherto state of trust in pre-colonial times between the youth and local traditional institutions which mobilized them in peace-building efforts, suddenly translated into mistrust and recruitment and mobilization against the colonial state. The youth of various cultural platforms across the country, under the vanguard of educated youth leaders, started to organize and form cultural associations which later metamorphosed into modern political parties. At independence in 1960, a large army of the youth

who were instrumental to Nigeria's freedom from colonial supremacy and were not lucky to have acquired western education largely because of the colonial policy of neglect and cultural considerations served as youth vanguards of their respective political parties. The period of thuggery and youth vanguardism in Nigerian politics was midwife during the high point of party politics before and after independence. Thus, the pattern and dynamics of party politics in Nigeria since independence have helped greatly in downgrading the positive role of the youth in peacebuilding(Jega, 2017).

The National Youths Policy recognizes that the youths are a key resource that can be tapped for the benefit of the entire country. Thus, the policy endeavors to tackle issues disturbing young people by including broad-based strategies that would provide the youth with meaningful opportunities to realize their potential. The policy provides a broad structure within which all stakeholders, including the private and civil society, will add to youth development. An implementation method is inbuilt into the policy.

### **Strategic Principles of Peace Building Process**

The strategic principles of peacebuilding are broad-based, multidimensional, and complex and it is an actor-driven occurrence rather than exclusively defined as the traditional role of the nation. To this end, Joan B. Kroc, Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego connoted some strategies for peace-building, which confirms that it is both systematic and technical procedure requiring synergy, skills, and a sense of perseverance on the part of government and citizens, of which the younger generation (youths) are their major and central appendage.

The strategic principles include; Peace-building goes beyond conflict transformation; Peace-building cannot ignore structural forms of injustice and violence; Peace-building is multifaceted and has multiple participants; Peace-building is founded on the ethic of interdependence, partnership, and limiting violence; Peace-building depends on relational skills; Peace-building analysis is complex, underlying cultures, historic, root causes, and immediate stressors are essential; Peace-building heals trauma, promotes justice and transforms relationship among the people; Peace-building requires values, goals, commitment to human rights and needs; Peace-building creates spaces where people interact in new ways, expanding experience and honing new means of communication; Peace-building requires capacity and relationship building at multiple levels (cited in Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This aspect of the study discusses the theory that forms the framework with which the research work is built. For this study, the theory used is Peacebuilding Theory.

### **Peace Building Theory**

Peace Building is an activity that aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the cultural and structural conditions that generate deadly or destructive conflict. A Marxist-inspired structuralist theory of peacebuilding sees peacebuilding as an analysis that focuses on justice and equality. Peacebuilding in this context is a revolutionary approach to mobilize the masses to achieve radical change in the international system. In the same vein, the realist theory of peacebuilding refers to peacebuilding as a way of maintaining stability through hegemonies' power and the preservation of interests.

By application, in enhancing of peacebuilding in Nigeria , there is need to incorporate youth into mediation, conciliation, and arbitration process and in resolving disputes and conflicts. For many decades in Africa mediation has been the main dominant approach to peacebuilding.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized mixed methods research design which comprises qualitative and quantitative research approaches. In the context of this study, the qualitative method involved the use of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Direct Observations (DOs) while the quantitative method involved the use of questionnaires. The secondary sources include archives, books, journals, magazines, and other relevant publications to the study. The secondary data was used to complement primary data to strengthen the findings of the study. The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The data was analyzed using excerpts, paraphrasing, and direct quotation. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in this study helps in understanding and assessing youth, political parties, and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The connection and relationship between Youth Partisanship and Peace Building in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the youth are the heroes, as well as victims, saviors, courageous amidst crises, criminals in the shantytowns, and military entrepreneurs in the war zones. Yet, as a category, youth are often approached as a fixed group or demographic cohort (Alpaslan Ozerdem:2016). Regardless of the misconception of youth contribution to national peace, security, and stability, the youth populations are the great pioneer, protagonist, and advocate of peace, especially if politics can be seen as a fertile training ground for the youth.

Thus, to make this a practicable idea, the Political parties must be ready to have the following done;

- a) Active involvement of youth in power politics.
- b) Refraining from using youth as Political thugs (it breeds the army of insurgents in the nearest future).
- c) Getting the youth involved in grassroots Politics.



- d) Inclusion of youth in the National working committee. This has give the youth good ground to learn the rudiments of conflict resolution which will expand their understanding and appreciation of Peace.
- e) Increasing the sense of belonging of Youth in intra-party decision-making has improved their level of commitment as they will not want to harm where they get some benefits.
- f) Rewarding the excellent youth, who has contributed to national security, honor, and development.
- g) Leadership by example by the party leader especially the democratic form of leadership. it serves as a guide for future leadership of the youth.

### **The pivotal roles the Nigerian youth play in enhancing peacebuilding and national stability as members of political parties in Nigeria**

It has been gathered and observed, Nigerian politics has been dominated by the old folks. However, there is still a sizeable number of youths who are partially or reduced to party members to be used mostly as political thugs and instruments for the actualization of the political ambitions of the old generation of politicians who refuse to step down for the youth to come on board. All these fuels directly or indirectly political instability, national insecurity, and underdevelopment. The Nigerian youth have always been part of their various community development and played important roles in the resolution of disputes and conflicts.

Nonetheless, few cases proved that the Nigerian youth still plays a significant role in enhancing the peace-building process in Nigeria. The initiation of the bill “Not too young to rule” by President Buhari during his first tenure between 2015-2019 has been a stimulant for generating interest of Nigerian youth in politics.

The youth play the following roles as party members which invariably enhance peace building in Nigeria;

- a) First-hand identification of latent conflict which might have been caused by the inadequacies of the old folk’s rulership.
- b) The youth has been participating in check and balances against the excessiveness of the intra-party administration by the old generation.
- c) New ideas and innovations are often born out of the minds of the creative youth. These ideas, help in introducing new ways and approaches to combating ever-dynamic intra-party and inter-party-political disputes, conflicts, and national political instabilities.
- d) Joint efforts of the youth to re-orient and sensitize the population of youth can help reset the minds of youth already given to masterminding political violence, which always undermines efforts at peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence.
- e) Youth representation, involvement, and participation in the political processes are vital to peacebuilding. Youth can be at the forefront to mitigate the new forms of conflict and disputes in the public sphere.

In addition, the responsibility of the youth is simply to revamp, rejuvenate and sustain the existing and modern status of our societies, nations, and world at large. Other roles are leadership, infrastructure, governance, innovations, etc. The Nigeria Youth has been working towards the advancement of the current technology, education, politics, and peace of the society.

As nations all over the world approach the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) deadline, the Nigeria youth have been participating in various aspects of peacebuilding processes such as reduction and elimination of illiteracy, poverty, inequality, right deprivation, humiliation, and lack of access to basic infrastructure. Moreover, the Nigerian youth are playing pivotal roles in the eradication of corruption, insecurity, gender-based violence, sexual assault, drug trafficking, human and child trafficking, and other social vices.

### **To what extent have the youth been contributing to conflicts and peace-building in Nigeria?**

As gathered, the contribution of the active youth in politics to the national political instabilities cannot be underrated in Nigeria's political history from 1960 to date. It can be established that their lack of sound knowledge of politics coupled with an overambitious power tussle with the present generation of leadership leads to incessant political upheavals within the party concerned. The Nigerian youth often find themselves in a tight situation with the more conservative leaders where their urge for radical changes always brings about conflict and tensions within the party. A good case study is a political conflict that ensued between the then governor of old Ondo State, Chief Adekunle Ajasin, and his more younger deputy governor, Chief Akin Omoboriowo. Their main contradiction centers on suspicion and on the part of Ajasin, the fear of being usurped by the younger Omoboriowo. Omoboriowo displayed disloyalty to his boss as a result of a claim of being neglected in the administration of the state, this imbroglio affected the now defunct Party (UPN) and its climax was the 1983 Ondo electoral crisis.

A recent case that could serve as fertile land for youth fueling intra-party conflict which may spread to National is the issue of the choice of presidential running mate as some youths are claiming that most of the presidential candidates for 2023 presidential elections, as well as their running mates, are old. Thus, denying the youth the access to contest for the most sensitive position in the government of the country. This, they claim, undermines the "Not too young to rule" agenda, and if this is not well contained, it could result in future political tension and conflict which may hamper the National state of harmony.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the roles of the youth in political party development, stability, and peacebuilding in Nigeria are fundamental. They are problem solvers and have a positive influence on other young people. The youth can create an identity for themselves and serves as an advocate of peace.

The study revealed that Nigerian Youth, in these contemporary times, has been actively involved in partisan politics and that a significant correlation between Youth participation in politics and

the peacebuilding process in Nigeria is well established. Now that the youth have been brought into political parties for more participation, their civic roles that they have been excluded from in the time past, there is a need for initiating programs and policies to better understand the roles of youth in political parties and the peace-building process.

There is a need to transform the youth in various political parties to make them useful to the society and contribute meaningfully to the Nation's peace-building process and national development. The youth have to look inward into their internal strength and do something resilient for the nation; their efforts must be channeled towards the revitalization of a production-based economy, inculcate a culture of peace and shun all acts of violence.

### **Recommendations**

- a) There should be inclusion of youth as member of National Peace Committee (NPC). In the same vein, youth leaders across the political parties should be invited during the signing of peace accord/pact by political parties during state and national elections or electoral process. This will facilitate and enhance peace-building in Nigeria political space.
- b) There should be orientation and reorientation of youth in various political parties by relevant organizations and institutions such as Centre for Peace and Strategies Studies (CPSS), Unilorin and Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) on the importance of peace and needs for youth to embrace culture of peace.
- c) The study recommends that Nigerian youth be properly enlightened and adequately equipped in peace education and peace-building processes.
- d) Youths are at the center of absolute strength, the youth should therefore be equipped with the best possible education and facilitated with favorable conditions to attain skills, be an asset to the community and that way contribute actively to peacebuilding and the development of the community.
- e) The self-development of the youth is directly tied with that of the society. For a society to find peace, the youth must be developed and helped. We clamor for capacity building and training.
- f) There is a need to build the capacity of the youth as peacebuilding actors and key to strengthening democratic governance and problem solvers in local and national politics.

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