



Research Article

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## Youth Political Participation and Party Politics during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

Basil Ekot

Zekeri Momoh

Department of Political Science and Diplomacy,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Veritas University,  
Abuja, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The waning of young participation in politics has made the involvement of Nigerian youth in politics a contentious issue since the country's return to democracy on May 29, 1999. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the level of youth participation at the party level during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This study used secondary data such as textbooks, Journal articles and online sources while content analysis was used to analyse the data collected. Moreover, this study is situated within the "Sleeping Dog Theory". The study argues that the African Democratic Congress (ADC) recorded the highest number of youth participation at the party level during the 2023 general elections. Other parties in order of increased youth participation include Action Democratic Party, New Nigeria's People Party (NNPP), Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), Action Alliance (AA) and Labour Party among others. However, Labour Party occupied sixth position, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) thirteen positions while the All Progressive Congress (APC) fifteen positions. This shows that the three dominant Political parties during the 2023 general elections namely Labour Party, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) were not among the leading political parties that encouraged youth participation at the party level during the 2023 general elections. On the whole, this study recommends among other things that Interparty Advisory Council (IPAC) which is the umbrella body for Political parties in Nigeria should work closely with the various political party leadership on ways to increase youth participation at the party level like the reduction of the party nomination/interest form.*

**Keywords:** Youth, Politics, Election, Political Party, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are more young people on the planet than ever before, with half of all people living under 30. It is important to remember that 90% of the world's population, or billions of young people, reside in developing countries. This stresses how important it is to involve young people in all political processes in order to find solutions to the world's most pressing problems (UNESCO 2013). In Nigeria, the youth constitute a viable population of the country. This explains why the youth remain the workforce in Nigeria today. Nigeria has 52.2 million youth (18-35 years old), or around

28% of the country's overall population, with a female to male ratio of 52.8:48.2 (NBS 2018). It is pertinent to note that while large population of the Nigeria youth constitute an asset to the nation on one hand, on the other hand, it has constituted a social problem to the country particularly as there is large population of unemployed youths that have been engaging in one form of social problem like armed robbery, prostitution etc.

A number of initiatives have been taken by election stakeholders to increase young political involvement since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999. Despite this intervention, young people's engagement in elective positions has not been encouraging due to a variety of circumstances, including the prevalence of money politics and the older generation's dominance in politics, which frequently repeats itself in every election cycle.

Prior to the holding of Nigeria's general elections in 2023, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) deregistered 74 political parties. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria saw the participation of only eighteen political parties: Accord (A), Action Alliance (AA), Action Democratic Party (ADP), Action Peoples Party (APP), African Action Congress (AAC), African Democratic Congress (ADC), All Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Allied Peoples Movement (APM), Boot party (BP), Labour Party (LP), National Rescue Movement (NRM), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Young Progressive Party (YPP), and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP).

Nevertheless, prior to the 2023 general elections despite the implementation of the Not-Too-Young to Run and the Ready- To- Run campaign to support increasing youth participation, the level of youth participation at the party level has not been encouraging. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the level of youth participation at the party level during 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

## 2. Conceptual Review: Youth Political Participation and Party Politics

Youth and young people are frequently used interchangeably. The two distinct concepts "youth" and "political participation," which make up the phrase "youth political participation," both require definitions in order for the notion to have any true meaning. Literature has provided a plethora of meanings of youth. In contrast to the United Nations, which defined youth as anybody between the ages of 15 and 24, the World Bank defined youth as anyone between the ages of 12 and 24. Youth, according to Galstyan (2019, 3), is a period of "transition from dependency to independence," although Hilker et al. (2009) argue that youth is more of a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood than a stable construct based on age. Individuals who fall within the age range of 18 to 35 years old are referred to as youth in this study.

Concurrently, Verba et al (1972:2) defined political participation as "those acts by citizens which are more or less directly focused on influencing the choosing of governmental officials and/or the actions they take". SIDA (2010) defined youth political participation as the active citizenship, civic engagement, policymaking, and political involvement of young people. This might take many different forms, such running for office, sitting on a local government council, or taking part in the financial process of the local government. Van Deth (2014:5) uses a variety of elements to explain the concept of political participation. According to him, political participation refers to people in their function as non-professionals or amateurs; it is voluntary; it is not mandated by law or directed by a ruling class; and it affects government, politics, or the state.

According to Milbrath (1965: 18), a comprehensive list of political participation activities includes (i) holding public office or party office, (ii) running for office, (iii) attending a caucus or strategy meeting, (iv) becoming an active party member, (v) volunteering time for a political campaign, (vi) attending a political meeting or rally, and (vii) making a financial contribution to a party or candidate. These are categorised as "spectator actions" in Rueden (2007), "transitional actions" in the middle, and "gladiator actions" in the first three. Despite being originally provided for Americans, this list probably applies to other civilizations with a fair amount of generality. Even yet, it is difficult to state that scholars have come to a consensus on what constitutes political

participation, putting aside the common and unintentional temptation to reduce it to the simple act of casting a ballot in elections or referendums. This study examines youth political participation within the context of “running for office”.

### 3. Literature Review: Youth Political Participation and Party Politics

Research on youth political activism in Nigeria has increased, especially after May 29, 1999, when Nigeria returned to democratic governance. For instance, Vite et al. (2020) investigated how political involvement is understood as well as the actions that either make up or are a part of it. In order to further understand political involvement, the study first provides an overview of how the idea has been defined and modified in earlier work. There has also been a quick review of the main discussion around whether actions qualify as political activity. It focuses on the investigation of the reasons why certain young people in Nigeria participate in politics and others do not. However, this study identifies knowledge gap in terms of the absence of study on the level of youth participation at the party level during 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

In the words of Zohdy (2017), making sure that youths are socially integrated in government can help prevent the costs to society that come with the marginalisation of youth, including decreased participation in elections rates, a fall in a number of percentage points of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), aggression, radicalism, criminal activity, and insecurity. Most youth initiatives view young people as only receivers of the benefits of governance rather than as collaborators or actors of government. However, this study identifies knowledge gap in terms of the absence of study on the level of youth participation at the party level during 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Ibezim (2019) notes that there are a number of barriers to young people getting involved in politics in Nigeria, with a lack of understanding about the potential benefits being the biggest one. The author continues by stating that other problems impacting youth include restricted capacity, social marginalisation, unemployment, and lack of resources and equipment. However, there is a lack of research in the literature about the extent of young involvement at the party level in Nigeria's general elections of 2023.

However, Galstyan (2019) contends that the reason why young people don't care about politics is that it doesn't address the issues that matter to them. Similar to this, Offiong (2018) argues that Nigerian youth leadership aspirations are doomed since the country's youth are too divided along ethnic lines to demand national reconciliation. Because they lack the funds to run for government and would prefer to be politicians' scapegoats, the younger generation keeps the elder generation in industrialised democracies and allows them to continue ruling countries. However, there is a lack of research in the literature about the extent of young involvement at the party level in Nigeria's general elections of 2023.

Olufowobi (2018) argues that a conducive atmosphere is all that is needed to enhance young people's involvement in politics; on the other hand, Badmus (2018) maintains that young people in Nigeria are ready to take an active role in politics, especially now that the international community is beginning to highlight the country's youth activities. This study does, however, point up a knowledge gap on the lack of research on the degree of young engagement at the party level in Nigeria's general elections of 2023.

In contrast, O'Toole (2015) argues that teens are drawn to and often engage in unofficial and other forms and forms of political participation, even if it may appear that they have no interest in official political activities. But according to Zohdy (2017), the least effective and most underutilised tactic in democracies is by far appointing young people as development leaders. However, there is a lack of research in the literature about the extent of young involvement at the party level in Nigeria's general elections of 2023. Against this backdrop, the goal of this study is to further this field of inquiry.

#### 4. Theoretical Issues on Youth political participation and Party Politics

Democratic governance requires functional institutions in order for government policies to translate into the type of infrastructural development and sustainable economic growth required for the welfare and self-actualization of most people. The relationships amongst entities such as the legislature, the various branches of the executive, and political parties that frequently suggest candidates for elected legislative and executive positions cannot be overstated (Yagboyaju et al. 2020).

Strong political parties or successful institutions, however, seldom ever emerge without a clear plan. The resurgence of modern institutionalism as a way of understanding human society and the role of strong personalities has been promoted by James Robinson and Daron Acemoglu, authors of the 2012 best-seller "Why Nations Fail" (as cited in Yagboyaju et al. 2020). Interestingly, the president and governors—who are sometimes viewed as the de facto state and national party leaders—are frequently involved in intra-party disputes. From 1999 to 2015 and from 2015 to the present, the PDP and the APC are the only parties to have held the president.

Adeniran (2015) examines the many kinds of party systems, their broad overview, the distinctions between the two- and multi-party systems in Nigeria with respect to their impact on governance, and ultimately recommends that Nigeria switch to a two-party system. He also suggests that when it comes to their formation, choice of leaders, choice of candidates, organisational design, and funding, political parties should not operate in a way that fosters division within the party but rather should represent democratic principles and the rule of law. This would, in the opinion of Adeniran (2015), strengthen a well-organized, amicable political system where the people's choices are freely represented.

Another problem is the occurrence of defection, which is based on the democratic principle of freedom of association and is important in modern party politics. Even in developed democracies like the USA, Canada, Germany, the UK, and the USA (Yagboyaju 2019). Numerous writers have sought to explain the massive political defections since the start of the Fourth Republic in 1999 (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005; Olatunbosun, 2018). In such initiatives, people who defected were asked if they did so largely to further their own narrow interests or out of altruism for the sake of the public. Political defections are a major issue in Nigeria today for a variety of reasons, including ideological vacuity, the excessive and unrestrained use of money in politics, and the dearth of effective internal dispute resolution procedures in many political organisations (Yagboyaju et al. 2020).

Yagboyaju et al. (2020) raise significant questions, though, such as whether political party founders and funders are serving the public good or their own personal interests, and whether the growth of political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has significantly reinforced the nation's democratic ideals. These issues are fascinating because of several occurrences involving political party operations over the 20 years of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. They include the divisive and irritating party primaries that precede every significant election and sometimes lead to protracted and inconvenient court battles as well as large political defections. While violence is increasingly becoming the standard and a permanent aspect of the political and electoral process, women's and young people's full participation has been particularly hampered by the unbridled use of money.

On the whole, the relevance of the Sleeping Dog Theory propounded by Almond and Verb to this study cannot be overemphasized. According to the "Sleeping Dog" Theory low participation reflects popular dissatisfaction with the government, which politicians will naturally want to preserve (Heywood, 2007:207). This is true particularly as it relates to the youth political participation in Nigeria's political process. A critical analysis of the level of youth involvement at the party level in Nigeria particularly since the return of the country to democratic rule have shown that there nearly absence of the youth in key national positions which has continued to make the Nigeria political process to be dominated by the older generation. Therefore, the older generation will be happy especially when there is declined youth candidacy in any election.

## 5. Youth Political Participation at the Party Level during the 2023 General Elections

Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, much emphasis has been placed on the general level of youth participation in politics. One area that has attracted less attention has been the participation of Nigeria youth especially at the party level that should serve as a desideratum for youth participation at the national level. Therefore, a close analysis of youth participation at the party level during the 2023 general elections is analysed in this study and its implications for future elections in Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Numbers of Candidates during the 2023 Elections

Positions	Candidates
Presidential	18
Vice-presidential	18
Governorship and Deputies	837
Senate	1,101
House of Representative	3,122
State House of Assembly	10,240
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,336</b>

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 1 above shows that there were 18 Presidential and Vice-presidential candidates that contested the 2023 presidential election. Besides, there were 837 Governorship and Deputies that contested the 2023 Gubernatorial election. Moreover, the position of Senate was contested by 1,101 candidates that contested the 2023 Senatorial election while the position of Members of the House of Representative were contested by 3,122 during the 2023 House of Representative election and 10,240 candidates contested the 2023 for the State House of Assembly election. In all a total of 15,336 candidates contested the 2023 general elections for the position of President, Vice-President, Governorship, Deputy Governorship, Senatorial, House of Representatives and State House of Assembly.

**Table 2:** Analysis of the Distribution of Youth Candidates

Position	Number of candidates	Percentage (%)	Total candidate
Presidential	0	0.0	0
Vice-presidential	0	0.0	0
Governorship and Deputies	51	12.2	837
Senate	41	3.7	1101
House of Representative	674	21.6	3,122
State House of Assembly	3,632	35.6	10,240
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,398</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>15,336</b>

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 2 shows that during the 2023 general election no youth contested for the position of President and Vice-President respectively. For the position of Governorship, Deputy Governorship, 51 youth contested which represent 12.2 percent. For Senatorial election 41 youth contested which represent 3.7 percent. For the House of Representatives election 674 youth contested which represent 21.6 percent while for the State House of Assembly 3,632 youth contested which represent 35.6 percent. In all 4,398 youth contested for the various positions for the Governorship, Deputy Governorship, Senatorial, House of Representatives and State House of Assembly during the 2023 general elections. This shows that there was more youth political participation at the lower level like the House of

Representatives and State House of Assembly when compared to the Governorship, Deputy Governorship and Senatorial positions.

**Table 3:** House of Representative Elections, Age Distribution of Candidates

Age (year)	Numbers of candidate	Percentages (%)
25-30	229	9.4
31-35	445	14.3
36-40	536	17.2
41-45	543 <sup>1</sup>	17.4
46-50	424	13.6
51-55	375	12.0
56-60	331	10.6
61 and above	234	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,115</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 3 shows the age distribution of candidates who contested for elective position into the House of Representative during the 2023 general election. Youth between the ages of 25-30 years were 229 representing 9.4 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative. Besides, youth between the ages of 31-35 years were 445 representing 14.3 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative. Adult between the ages of 36-40 years were 536 representing 17.4 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative. Moreover, adult between the ages of 46-50 years were 424 representing 13.6 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative. Furthermore, adult between the ages of 51-55 years were 375 representing 12.0 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative and adult between the ages of 56-60 years were 331 representing 7.5 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative and adult between the ages of 61 and above years were 234 representing 7.5 percent of the candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representative. Therefore, the adult between the ages of 41-45 has the highest numbers of candidates who seek for election into the House of Representative. The implication of this, is that adult dominated the candidates who seek for election into the House of Representative.

**Table 4:** Youth Candidates in the House of Representative Elections

Geo-political zone	Number of candidates	Percentages (%)
North central	478	15.3
North East	390	12.5
North West	713	22.9
South East	726	13.7
South-South	537	17.2
South West	571	18.3

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

From table 4 above the North Central geo-political zone had 478 candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives which represent 15.3 percent. North East geo-political zone had 390 candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives which represent 12.5 percent. North West geo-political zone had 713 candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives which represent 22.9 percent. South East geo-political

zone had 726 candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives which represent 13.7 percent. South-South geo-political zone had 537 candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives which represent 17.2 percent and South West geo-political zone had 571 candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives which represent 18.3 percent. From the above analysis the South East geo-political zone has the highest number of youth candidates who contested for the position into the House of Representatives with 726 candidates followed by the North West geo-political zone with 712 candidates.

**Table 5:** Youth Candidacy in the State House of Assembly Elections

Age (years)	Number of candidates	Percentage (%)
25-30	1,670	46.0
31-35	1,962	54.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,632</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 5 shows youth candidacy in the State House of Assembly Elections. Youth ages between 25-30 years were 1,670 representing 46 percent and youth ages between 31-35 years were 1,962 representing 54 percent. Therefore, there were more youth participation between the ages of 31-35 years compared to ages of 25-30 years.

**Table 6:** Number of Youth Candidates for House of Representatives by ranking of political parties

Political party	Number of Candidates	Percentages (%)	Number of Candidates in the House of Representative election
ADC	643	14.9	132
ADP	394	9.2	44
NNPP	390	9.1	56
SDP	376	8.7	73
AA	346	8.0	30
LP	293	6.8	43
NRM	285	6.6	34
PRP	225	5.2	42
APM	207	4.8	42
ZLP	185	4.2	35
YPP	174	4.0	29
APP	169	3.9	29
APGA	130	3.0	24
PDP	131	3.0	18
A	98	2.3	16
APC	96	2.2	12
BP	89	2.1	11
AAC	77	1.8	4

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 6 shows the Number of youth Candidates for House of Representatives by ranking of political parties. ADC party has 643 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 14.9 percent. The second party was ADP with 394 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 9.2 percent. The third was the NNPP with 390 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 9.1 percent. The fourth political party was the SDP with 376 youth

Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 8.7 percent. Fifth was the AA party with 346 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 8.0 percent. Sixth political party was LP with 293 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 6.8 percent. The seventh political party was NRM with 285 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 6.6 percent. The eight political party was PRP with 225 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 5.2 percent. The ninth political party is ZLP with 185 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 4.2 percent. The tenth political party was YPP with 17 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 4 percent. The eleventh political party was APP with 169 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 3.9 percent. The twelfth political party is APGA with 130 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 3.0 percent. The thirteenth political party was PDP with 131 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 3.0 percent. The fourteen political party was A with 98 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 2.3 percent. The fifteen political party was APC with 96 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 2.2 percent. The sixteen political party was AP with 89 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 2.1 percent and the seventeen political party was AAC 77 with youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 1.8 percent.

**Table 7:** Total Number of Youth Candidates in the State House of Assembly by Political Parties Ranking

Political Parties	Number of Youth Candidates
ADC	511
ADP	350
NNPP	334
SDP	303
AA	316
LP	250
NRM	251
PRP	183
ARM	165
ZLP	148
YPP	145
APP	140
APGA	106
PDP	113
A	82
APC	84
BP	78
AAC	73

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 7 shows the total number of youth candidates in the state house of assembly by political parties ranking. ADC party has 511 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The second party was ADP with 350 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The third was the NNPP with 334 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The fourth political party was the SDP with 303 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The AA party with 316 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The LP with 250 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The NRM with 251 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the



2023 general elections. The eight political party was PRP with 183 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The ninth political party is ARM with 165 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The ZLP with 148 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections.

The YPP with 145 youth candidates who contested for various positions during the 2023 general elections. The APP with 169 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 3.9 percent. The twelfth political party is APGA with 130 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 3.0 percent. The thirteenth political party was PDP with 131 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 3.0 percent. The fourteen political party was A with 98 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 2.3 percent. The fifteen political party was APC with 96 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 2.2 percent. The sixteen political party was AP with 89 youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 2.1 percent and the seventeen political party was AAC 77 with youth Candidates for House of Representatives which represent 1.8 percent.

**Table 8:** Parties Distribution of Youth Candidates by ages

Political parties	Numbers of Youth	Age 25-30 (years)	31-35 years)
ADC	511	273	238
ADP	350	172	178
NNPP	316	145	185
AA	334	176	140
SDP	303	145	158
LP	253	105	145
NRM	248	104	144
PRP	183	102	81
APM	165	67	98
ZLP	148	67	81
YPP	145	62	83
APP	140	45	95
PDP	113	30	83
APGA	106	40	66
APC	84	21	63
A	82	45	37
SP	78	31	47
ACC	75	37	36

**Source:** (Yiaga Africa, 2023)

Table 8 shows Parties Distribution of Youth Candidates by ages. The ADC has 511 numbers of youth candidates with 273 between the ages of 25-30 years and 238 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. ADP has 350 numbers of youth candidates with 172 between the ages of 25-30 years and 178 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. NNPP has 316 numbers of youth candidates with 145 between the ages of 25-30 years and 185 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. AA has 334 numbers of youth candidates with 176 between the ages of 25-30 years and 140 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. SDP has 303 numbers of youth candidates with 145 between the ages of 25-30 years and 158 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. LP has 253 numbers of youth candidates with 105 between the ages of 25-30 years and 145 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. NRM has 248 numbers of youth candidates with 104 between the ages of 25-30 years and 144 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. PRP has 183 numbers of youth candidates with 102 between the ages of 25-30 years and 81 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years.

APM has 165 numbers of youth candidates with 67 between the ages of 25-30 years and 98 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. ZLP has 148 numbers of youth candidates with 67 between the ages of 25-30 years and 81 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years.

Moreover, YPP has 145 numbers of youth candidates with 62 between the ages of 25-30 years and 83 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. APP has 140 numbers of youth candidates with 45 between the ages of 25-30 years and 95 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. PDP has 113 numbers of youth candidates with 30 between the ages of 25-30 years and 83 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. APGA has 106 numbers of youth candidates with 40 between the ages of 25-30 years and 66 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. APC has 84 numbers of youth candidates with 21 between the ages of 25-30 years and 63 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. A has 82 numbers of youth candidates with 45 between the ages of 25-30 years and 37 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years. SP has 78 numbers of youth candidates with 31 between the ages of 25-30 years and 47 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years and ACC has 75 numbers of youth candidates with 37 between the ages of 25-30 years and 36 numbers of youth candidates between the ages of 31-35 years.

From the forgoing analysis of the level of youth participation at the party level during 2023 general elections in Nigeria, studies have shown that youth candidacy in the 2015 represented 21 percent and 2019 general elections shows that the youth candidacy was 34.2 percent which shows 13.2 percent increase. For instance, during the 2019 general elections across the 991 seats in the 36 State Houses of Assembly, 68 members -elect are between the age of 31 and 35 who will sit and legislate at the state level. This represents 6.08 percent of the members of the State Houses of Assembly (Yiaga Africa, 2019).

It can also be deduced from the above analysis that youth candidacy records decline from 34 percent in 2019 election to 28.6 percent in the 2023 general elections. For instance, youth candidacy for House of Representatives plunges from 27.4 percent in 2019 to 21.6 percent in 2023. Similarly, the State House of Assembly also dropped from 41.8 percent in 2019 to 35.6 percent in 2023. Though, political parties during the 2023 general elections nominated more youth candidates for legislative elections at the state level than executive or National Assembly positions. Besides, State Houses of Assembly elections and House of Representatives election recorded the highest level of youth candidacy. For example, 35.6 percent of candidates of State Assembly are youth while 21.6 per cent of the House of Representatives candidates are youth and 3.7 percent of the candidates in the Senatorial elections are youth.

Again, with respect to the female youth candidates, the ADC had 68 female candidates for the 2023 general elections, APM had 54 female candidates for the 2023 general elections have the highest number of female youth candidates. While, the APC had female candidates for the 2023 general elections and PDP had 5 female candidates for the 2023 general elections. Among the young candidates, 7 individuals representing 0.2 percent belong to persons living with disabilities in the 2023 general elections (Yiaga, 2023).

These research findings agree with the "Sleeping Dog" theory which states that low participation indicates broad satisfaction with government, which politicians, in turn, will be anxious to maintain. Hence, the absence of the youth in key national positions will continue to make the Nigeria political process to be dominated by the older generation. Therefore, the older generation will be happy especially when there is declined youth candidacy in any election.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the return of Nigeria to democratic rule on May 29, 1999 the involvement of the Nigerian youth has been treated with mixed feelings due to the declining nature of youth involvement in the political process. This study investigated the level of youth participation at the party level during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study argued that the African Democratic Congress (ADC) recorded the

highest number of youth participation at the party level during the 2023 general elections. Other parties in order of increased youth participation include Action Democratic Party, New Nigeria's People Party (NNPP), Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), Action Alliance (AA) and Labour Party among others. However, Labour Party occupied sixth position, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) thirteen positions while the All Progressive Congress (APC) fifteen positions. This shows that the three dominant Political parties during the 2023 general elections namely Labour Party, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) were not among the leading political parties that encouraged youth participation at the party level during the 2023 general elections. Thus, All Progressive Congress (APC) which is the ruling party as well as other political parties that underperformed in the area of youth participation in elective position should follow the mechanisms put in place by the Action Democratic Party in order to improve youth participation at the party level. Hence, this study argued that a lot is needed to be achieved for Nigeria to have increased number of youth participation in elective positions in the country. From the above analysis, the decline in youth candidacy at the party level especially during the 2023 general elections have affirmed that a lot is required to be done by the election stakeholders especially Interparty Advisory Council (IPAC) in Nigeria, in improving youth candidacy in future elections. It is with this in view that the following recommendations are put forward as ways of improving youth candidacy at the party level in Nigeria.

## 7. Recommendations

- a. The Interparty Advisory Council (IPAC) which is the umbrella body for Political parties in Nigeria should work closely with the various political party leadership on ways to increase youth participation at the party level like the reduction of the party nomination/interest form.
- b. The Interparty Advisory Council (IPAC) should also come up with a policy statement that will ensure that the youth are given party nomination form free of charge or at a reduced rate. This will among other things address the issue of youth not having the needed money to obtain their party nomination form. Moreover, this approach has proved to be effective with the ADC political party that has the highest number of youth candidates during the 2023 general elections.
- c. To secure electoral victory for the Nigeria youth, political parties should provide technical, financial and logistics support to the youth candidates during campaigns
- d. The mass media should prioritize coverage of youth candidates by ensuring that adequate airtime should be provided to young candidates to provide visibility for youth candidates and improve public perception of youth candidates.
- e. At the party, level political parties should put in place some internal mechanism like youth empowerment framework that will encourage more youth membership in to their party by assigning roles and responsibilities to them.

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