

## **Youth Activism and the Emergence of the 'Third Force' in Lagos Politics: A Study of Undergraduates of Lagos State Tertiary Institutions**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the issues and prospects which emerged, following the activities of the youths in the last general elections in Nigeria and Lagos State in particular in February 2023. The political atmosphere of Lagos politics was confronted with a shift in paradigm which saw youths actively involved in the transition of power thereby bringing in a 'third force' in the history of political transition of the state. The study examines the challenges of social justice and political inclusion agitated by the youths as a vital force, which led to youth agitation. It is on the basis of search for accountability and good governance that this study through the methods of quantitative and qualitative analyses involving the use of questionnaire and oral interview to engage 2500 students across the Lagos State University, Ojo and Epe campuses; Lagos State University of Technology, Ikorodu Campus; and Lagos State University of Education, Ijanikin and Epe Campuses respectively, in January 2024. The research aimed at showing the motive behind the youth activism and rigorous participation in the transition process, which was discovered not to be based on political hooliganism

and aggrandizement, but a genuine agitation for social justice and better accountability in governance. This study ultimately recommends the utilization of the vibrancy of youths in contemporary knowledge and technological advancement at various levels of policy and decision-making to ensure a better society.

**Keywords:** Lagos Politics, Lagos State Tertiary institutions, Social Justice, Third Force, Youth Activism.

## **Introduction**

Lagos has witnessed a surge in Youth activism in recent years. The motive of the activism is usually characterized with the demand for social justice, accountability and inclusiveness, of a more just and equitable society. Lagos State has witnessed a surge in youth activism in recent years. The motives of the activism are usually not clear-cut as they are sometimes characterized with hooliganism, youthful exuberance and personal aggrandizement which have seen important players including the labour unions, civil rights movements, student movements benefiting immensely from such youth activism. However, in the last political transition, the Lagos political order witnessed a dynamic paradigm shift of a 'Third Force' in the Lagos politics. It was a wave which challenged the existing political philosophy of the state, thereby bringing in a significant and crucial change in the participation of young people in the political affairs of the state which concern their future well-being and social justice. Though the youths' activities were faced with a series of challenges, such as translating activities into votes; establishing a strong political base; varying ideologies and agendas of different youth movements which made it difficult for them to present a unified ideology to build a broad and unique coalition; financial constraints; lack of established networks for obligations, and the

challenges of security agencies through government intrusion; etc., the youths still made a great impact on the transition process during the period under review.

Thus, this research seeks to conceptualize youth activism and the paradigm shift which brought about the new narrative of the 'third force' in Lagos politics, and to thoroughly analyse the intricate dynamics underlying the motive, and the far-reaching consequences of youth activism in the transformation and reconfiguration of political landscape of Lagos State. For this purpose, the students of Lagos State tertiary institutions across the state were engaged via questionnaires and surveys in order to get feed-backs on the root cause(s) of the serious contention among the youths in relation to the existing political structure and the new force evident in recent political history of the state, and the combatant role the youth activism played in the establishment of an inclusive political structure.

In order to be able to deal with the issues involved thoroughly, this research is divided into four sections. The first section is the literature review. Here, the discussion pertaining to the meaning of youth activism in general, the historical background of youth activism in Lagos State, and the scope and limitation of the youth activism are reviewed. The challenges and achievements of youth activism in Lagos state are also analyzed in this section. The second part describes the methodology, its justification, and its relevance to the scope of the inquiry. The third part analyzes the result of the data retrieved from the questionnaires administered to 2500 students across various faculties and schools of the five identified campuses of Lagos State tertiary institutions. 500 questionnaires were

administered to every campus. This section also embarks on the analysis of the issues involved with a view to deducing whether or not the feed-backs from the surveys oppose or support the inquiry concerning the implications of youth activism for the emergence of the 'third force' in Lagos politics, following the recent happenings in the last political transition. The fourth part is the recommendation and conclusion of the study.

## **Literature Review**

The roots of youth political engagement in Lagos can be traced to the colonial era. The imposition of British rule in the late 19th century sparked resentment and resistance among the city's youth population. Educational institutions like Kings College became breeding ground for critical thought and political activism (Ademiluyi, 2010). Students formed the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934, which was one of the first organized youth political groups in the country. The youth movement challenged colonial policies, advocated for self-government and fought for improved educational opportunities (Falola and Haeton, 2008). Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and others who championed the course of Nigeria's independence were young students. They started their agitation as student union activists and formed formidable groups that challenged colonial rule (Afolayan, 2018). This movement, though short-lived, laid the groundwork for future generations of Lagos youth activists. In the years after, Nigeria's independence in 1960 ignited a wave of optimism amongst young people. Youth organizations like the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) actively participated in the struggle for self-rule, and envisioned a brighter future for the nation (Akindele & Momoh, 2013). However, this optimism soon

gave way to disillusionment. The political instability and corruption of the post-independence years dampened youth idealism (Osage, 2018).

The rise of military regimes in the late 20th century witnessed a resurgence of youth activism in Lagos. The clamour for social justice and welfare calls for a rebirth, protest against military rule, educational reforms, and economic hardship became common place (Adebayo, 2017). The "Ali Must Go" protest in 1978, a student-led movement that successful ousted the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos for perceived authoritarianism, stands as a testament to the power of organized youth activism at the time (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The return to civilian rule in 1999 brought a beacon of hope for a more democratic future. However, many of the established political parties dominated by former military figures, failed to adequately address the aspirations of young people. This led to a new narrative of youth activism tactics. Organizations like Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR) and the Civil Liberties Organizations (CLO) emerged, focusing on human rights advocacy and good governance (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The 21st century has witnessed a significant transformation in youth activism in Lagos. The rise of social media and digital tools has empowered young people to collect, and bypass traditional media gatekeepers. The #EndSars Movement of 2020, a youth-led social media campaign demanding police reform exemplifies this shift. Using the Twitter (now X), Instagram, Facebook and other social media platforms, young Nigerians mobilized nationwide protest

command, bringing police brutality in the forefront of national discourse (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Further, while youths are still very much interested in protest has a potent technique for engaging the government, this engagement in recent time has taken another dimension. Youth-led organizations are increasingly involved in issues based advocacy, voter education initiatives and community development projects (Olusanya & Adetonke, 2023). Also, young people are now making ways into formal politics, seeking to challenge the status quo from within the system. This notwithstanding, they are still confronted with the challenges of limited resources, and structural barriers from the 'elders' of established parties who dominate the forefront, thereby curtailing the youth political aspirations (Jega, 2020).

However, the recent decades of youth activism has witnessed a sharp clamour for social justice, welfare and accountability. Hence, the notion of the 'Third Force' in politics alludes to the emergence of novel political entities that contest the prevailing dominance of traditional parties. This phenomenon has been observed in various contexts, such as the emergence of century's parties in European politics (Huber & Schimpf, 2020). These powerful influences frequently attract disillusioned voters who yearn for alternatives to established political factions, thereby fostering an environment conducive to pioneering policy concepts and a broad spectrum of representation.

In the bustling metropolis of Lagos, Nigeria, there has been a remarkable upsurge in the active involvement of the younger generation in the realm of politics. Recent research conducted by Adelekan (2018) reviews a noticeable trend where young

individuals are wholeheartedly engaged in grassroots movements, passionately championing a wide array of causes ranging from the pursuit of social equity to the preservation of the environment. Leveraging on the power of social media platforms, these youth activists have been able to effortlessly disseminate their heartfelt messages and effectively mobilize substantial support from diverse range of individuals.

Youth activism in Lagos, it is argued, is driven by various factors including economic inequality, social and political challenges and a need for more inclusive governance (Oluwakemi, 2021). The rise of youth activism in Lagos has important consequences for its political advancement, and competitive political landscape as existing structures faced challenges from the 'new force' (Oyedemi, 2023).

## **Methodology**

The methodology adopted in this research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Quantitative method involves the use of questionnaires offered to students in campuses of Lagos State tertiary institutions viz: Lagos State University, Ojo; Lagos State University, Epe Campus; Lagos State University of Technology, Ikorodu; Lagos State University of Education, Ijanikin and Epe Campuses respectively. Qualitative analysis is done with the aim of interrogating and ascertaining the motive and prospects envisaged by the youths in engaging significantly in the emergence of the 'Third Force' in Lagos politics, especially in the last general elections that marked the beginning of a new political dispensation in the state. The use of quantitative data in this research is inevitable for the reasons stated by Levy (2017), who argues that quantitative research investigates how people's attitudes

and behaviors are influenced by the social, socio-economic, or environmental context in which they live by looking at people in their actual environment. This explains how the study's strategy affects how data are interpreted. Levy's claims and findings on the use of data analysis actually support and validate the quantitative data analysis approach adopted for this research, since it will involve empirical and numerical data to substantiate its findings.

The analysis of the data gathered for this research for empirical evidence is collated through surveys to ascertain which of the identified factors to the subject-matter has the greatest outcome (Halperin & Health, 2020). It is also noted that quantitative method is suitable when the target population to be studied is massive (SreeKumar, 2023). The qualitative approach is also necessary to this study because it allows for thematic analysis and allows for a clear understanding of the survey and outcome of the investigation. The deductive approach is inevitable to this research because of the clearly outlined objective and outcome, thereby giving no chances for speculation in the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Taherdoost, 2022).

Consequently, this research adopts established themes to analyze the factors that may necessarily influence the ability of the emergence of a 'Third Force' in Lagos politics. A total of 2,500 were targeted across the five identified campuses and 500 questionnaires distributed to students of each institutions respectively. The technique adopted for this survey is the purposive sampling technique, used for selecting participants of the study.

The table below explains the reason and justification for adopting the  
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purposive sampling technique.

S/N	INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
1.	Students who are identified as activists	Students who are not identified as activists
2.	Students who have participated in activism	Students who have not participated in activism

In the first instance, the research adopted the qualitative approach to engage the students' governments in these campuses to gain insights into their understanding of the subject of the research. After which, the quantitative research technique is used in collecting data through questionnaires to the targeted respondents of various campuses using the inclusion table above. The data collected were analyzed using the descriptive method since it explores the contingency tables spread 'banners' and 'stubs'. The significant factor which also supports these method is that a hypothesis is not necessary at the inception of the research, though it can be brought up afterwards (SreeKumar, 2023). The reason for this approach is that it ensures adequate result which shows how the outcome of students' activism can provide a useful and viable information for decision-making and policies in governance. The pertinent question now is: "can the emergence of the 'Third Force' change the political structure of Lagos State?"

Thus, the subject of this research is youth activism and the emergence of a 'Third Force' in Lagos politics. Before now, there were two strong political structures in Lagos politics: the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC). Though, over the years, the latter has dominated the political power of the state. However, in the last transition of power, there was a new

narrative which usher in the presence of a 'Third Force', with the Labour Party (LP) seemingly being largely supported by the youths, which almost obtained the political structure of the state. Thus, within the context of this study, two (2) hypothetical variables are involved: Youth activism as the emergent 'Third Force', and Lagos politics. When these variables are analyzed, the German question cited in the preceding paragraph will emerge.

Importantly, the contingency table is relevant when information on an issue or subject is needed from a variety of people who may not belong to the same ideology. For this purpose, the four-fold contingency table analysis will be appropriate for analyzing the opinions, views and students' standpoints as regard to the emergence of the 'Third Force' in Lagos politics, following the activism of youth including students in recent times. This is conducted carefully to understand the strategies, challenges and achievements of youth activism, especially as it affects Lagos politics.

### **Critical Analysis**

For decades, Lagos politics has been characterized by the dominance of the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party. These two parties have been criticized for their lack of ideological distinctions with both parties often seen as being focused on patronage rather than distinct policy agenda. Thus, voters who were disillusioned by lack of responsiveness to their needs by these political parties began to search for alternative political options.

This search birthed various responses to the challenges aforementioned; hence, the new narrative of the third Force in Lagos politics championed by the young ones. The concept of the 'Third

'Force' in Lagos politics is multifaceted. It refers to loose-coalition of movements or of individuals seeking to disrupt the existing structure of Lagos politics. This force is driven by a chant for change amongst the electorate, particularly the youth population. Following the distribution of questionnaires to 2500 students across the two campuses of Lagos State University Ojo and Epe; the Ikorodu Campus of Lagos State University of Technology; and the two campuses of Lagos State University of Education: Ijanikin and Epe respectively (with 500 questionnaires administered to each campus), 2450 students responded as the data collected, analysed and filled within their corresponding spaces on the contingency table show.

The retrieved data shows that 1787 were males and 663 were females; while 50 students do not match into any of the identified sexes. The ages of respondents were between 20 and 25, while a few of them were above 25.

The table below indicates the four-fold contingency table, the frequency counts of the number of respondents in response to the questionnaires administered.

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	NO	UNDETERMINED
1	Are you an activist?	2,350	65	35
2	Have you participated in any political activism?	2,356	68	26
3	Can you openly identify as an activist?	2,345	60	45
4	Is there any justification for a 'third force' in Lagos politics?	2,215	188	47
5	Can youth activism bring about social justice and inclusion in Lagos?	2,350	75	25
6	Is there any prospect for youth activism in Lagos?	2,390	40	20
7	Can government policies encourage youth activism?	828	1,572	50
8	Are the challenges listed in this study facing youth activism in Lagos State Tertiary Institutions?	2,420	18	12
9	Can the 'third force' in Lagos politics be sustained in light of the current political structure of the state?	1,286	1,134	30
10	Is there any need for paradigm shift in Lagos politics?	1,160	1,270	20
11	Can youth activism provide a better framework for good leadership and governance for Lagos citizens?	2285	130	35
12	Do you agree that the emergence of the 'third force' in Lagos politics is to challenge the status quo?	1,782	638	30
13	Do you agree that the emergence of the 'third force' in Lagos politics is the same as the old narratives?	1060	1,365	25

The contingency table shows 13 questions on the questionnaire administered. Responses in the data analyzed above show how youth activism will lead to the emergence of a new political structure in the state which will enhance social justice, better living standard, and good governance.

The outcome of the frequency distribution of respondents on the contingency table in the surveys carried out on the campuses administered for students were clearly understood. The figures show a basic foundation and understanding of their immediate environments. As indicated in the questions one to three (1-3), the study shows that students understand what it means to be an activist and their level of participation in political activism is encouraging for the context of this study.

The importance of question three (3) is to show that students are not just participating in activism for the fun of it or that they are brainwashed but that they actually understand the cause they are

agitating for and can declare their opinions openly.

The feed-backs on questions four (4); five (5); six (6); nine (9); ten (10); eleven (11) and twelve (12) respectively prepare the ground for the need to propose a better framework for the sustainability of the established structure of Lagos politics. Responses to questions seven (7) and eight (8) need government prompt and positive actions to encourage the youths to contribute positively to the growth of the State. The outcome of respondents' answer to question 13 requires serious action on the part of the existing political structure of the state to convince the citizens of a renewed hope and better future.

Having analyzed the data collected to investigate the root causes of youth activism and the implications of the youths' actions identified as the need for social justice and inclusion in governance of the state, this study proffers the following recommendations for the society:

### **Recommendations**

Regardless of the challenges, the emergence of the 'Third Force' in Lagos politics in the last transition of democratic leadership makes it imperative for the political structure of Lagos and policy-makers to ensure that the youths are well informed about the democratic processes of the state. To achieve this and to guide the political consciousness of the youths who are the political engine room of every society, the following are proffered as purposeful mechanisms for the integration of the youths in establishing a viable political structure in Lagos State.

Firstly, there is a need to create awareness for the youths' crucial roles which they must play in the process of sustaining and

deepening democracy in the Lagos political structure through the use of civil society organizations, progressive-minded institutions and organizations such as non-governmental organizations, which should be saddled with the task of sensitization programmes like value-re-orientation and ethical rebirth.

Secondly, the youth wings of the political structure of the state should be encouraged on the need to constantly educate their members on the way policies and decisions are made, the motives for such decisions and the effects of its sustainability. In other words, the youth wings must inculcate in their members the practice of internal democracy such that the diverse interests of members are sacrosanct.

Thirdly, this study recommends that the students bodies rather than remaining passive and succumbing to the dictate and desires of school authorities to silence the vibrancy of students' union governments in tertiary institutions, the students should learn from history and make bold to take decisive decisions to ensure that the good legacy left by past comrades are restored where constructive activism played a vital role in shaping government policies rather than playing money politics.

Further, there is a need to admit an overwhelming number of youths who are artisans and traders into constructive youth activism through forming them into cooperative organizations, thereby creating a platform for them to interact and be informed through which means their social and political consciousness is raised to appreciate their roles as free citizen and their functions as good future leaders.

The youths with the aim of being relevant in the democratic consolidation of the dividends of democracy in Lagos, need to build a working relationship with the leadership through civil society organizations, to compel political authorities to put their interest in the political, social and economic activities of the state.

Youth Parliaments in the tertiary institutions in the state should be saddled with the task of deliberating on socio-political and economic situations in the state and should be mandated to come up with common and viable positions to the government rather than allowing the menace of god-fatherism and corrupt practices to overwhelm them thereby agitating for unnecessary ideologies.

Finally, it is a known fact that existence of democratic culture is vital for a sound mobilization of people for political participation and trust-building which is a challenge in today's democracy. It is the considered view of this study that valuable political culture should be instilled into our youths for the enhancement of policies and consolidation of democracy in the governance of Lagos.

## **Conclusion**

In this inquiry, we have examined the roles of youth activism in the emergence of the 'Third Force' in Lagos politics. The argument of the study is to the effect that the growing agitation of youths for accountability and more inconclusiveness in the political affairs of the state should be allowed since the clamour for change by these young people which is echoed by the emerging stiff opposition to the existing political structure of the state which warranted the emergence of the 'Third Force' should be accommodated. An exploration of the roles played by the youths in the past and in the

contemporary political landscape of Lagos was given. The analysis of the data collated for the purpose of ascertaining the cause of the emergence of the 'Third Force' in Lagos politics was carefully done and we concluded that though youth activism is inevitable in any society, such activism should be properly guided to ensure stability, accountability, social justice and peaceful coexistence of every member of the polity.

We conclude, therefore, that the future of youths' engagement in Lagos politics holds immense potentials, with their creativity, dynamism and high technological inclination. Young people have the power to be a driving force for positive change. By harnessing this energy and fostering a culture of inclusion, Lagos can build a more responsive, accountable and just future for all her citizens within the established political structure.

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