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From politics to pleasure and protest: what does the future hold in the political arena, given the alleged growing "youth de-politisation" today?

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Abstract: Young people's mode of political participation in recent years has been an object of concern and debate among political scientists and youth researchers. Research-based evidence has shown that many of them are not interested in politics like the youth of yesteryears. This trend has been described as "youth de-politisation" or youth political disengagement. Young people are said to now find comfort in pleasure and "protest politics" which often do not lead them to political positions in government or in governance institutions. Some researchers have thus described them as a 'protest generation' in contrast to the 'political generation' of their parents and grandparents. This could have crucial political implications in the future, more so because a large proportion of the world's population today consists of young people as the UN has documented. This paper thus seeks to examine these political implications (which have received little attention from researchers) from two theoretical perspectives: political science and youth studies. Questions as to whether this alleged growing youth de-politisation is jeopardizing or will jeopardize future democracy and governance, especially from the point of view of competent political leadership, or if it is merely a replacement of traditional and/or institutional forms of politics by young people with new patterns of expression and participation that some researchers term 'juventization', is examined. The cause(s) of this de-politisation is also looked into, and suggestions about youth participation in the future are made.

Keywords: youth, political participation, juventization, de-politisation, future implications.

Introduction

Participation in politics among young people today is allegedly taking a down turn, and thus has been a serious object of concern and debate among political scientists and youth researchers in recent decade. By politics, I mean the art of government and/or governing and the processes that lead to it. And by youth, I mean 'young adults' or those aged between 18 and 30.[1] Political science often interprets them as the least experienced cohort in the society, while youth studies perceive them from three perspectives: a young generation, a life stage, and a social group (Kovacheva 2005:21, 24). However, the youth is not however a homogenous entity. Except in age groupings, they are virtually heterogeneous in many things: from diverse origins to social background variables. In the globalizing world of today, their heterogeneity seems to have become their strength – i.e. a unity in their diversity – in the face of incessant political and economic crises that the world has turned into. This unity in diversity essentially brings with it a fecund source of ideas, creativity, innovations, actions and activisms against existent traditional structures, especially in the political arena, largely perceived by them as outdated and counterproductive, hence needing *change*.

In this paper, I shall first discuss youth and politics yesterday and today, using various research-based evidences and arguments, including also examples from some countries. Subsequently, I shall examine young people's alter participation or new patterns of political expression and participation

[1] There are varied opinions on the age category that describes the youth. For the UN, it is 16 to 24; Africa Union: 16-29; EU Commission/Council of Europe: 13-30. Various agencies and researchers also have their own age conceptions.

today. In the conclusion, I shall discuss the political implications of these in the future, and suggest possible better ways forward for young people in the political arena.

Youth and politics yesterday and today

Until the late 1980s, the youth were active backbones of the mainstream traditional political process, especially political parties and movements, in many countries. In the 1950s through the 1980s, various nationalist vanguard movements were engineered, headed, or energized by young people usually under the aegis of 'youth wings' or youth political organizations. In Africa as well as in some parts of Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, for example, such was the case. Youth political organizations thrived vibrantly through many years after independence, and were a major source of recruitment of new young members for political parties. In this way, these parties and indirectly, governments, were continually rejuvenated, reformed and enriched demographically and ideologically. In Finland, for instance, Flack (2009) argues that 'political youth organizations' were an essential part of the Finnish political system because in addition to organizing political fairs to awaken young people's interest in politics, they also serve as recruiting centers for political parties through which future decision-makers are recruited and trained to run societal affairs in the political space.[2] This training is usually done through active participation in party affairs. Besides, key youth party members are also periodically appointed to key party and/or governmental positions as part of this training process (ibid). Such was also the case in Africa where a good number of young party members emerged as MPs, government ministers and/or political ambassadors, including also high officials in regional and international organizations. For example, in Nigeria, late Matthew Mbu became an MP at the age of 23 in 1952, a minister of labor at 25, high commissioner to the UK at 26, a defense and naval minister at 31, and a high representative in Washington DC at 36.[3] In Turkey also, Lüküslü (2005) affirms that a young political generation emerged at the start of the twentieth century under the aegis of Young Turk Movement. Its main aim was a rapid transformation of the political and social systems of Turkey from the ruins of the Ottoman rule. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk eventually became the young leader of this movement, leading it to success, and eventually becoming the founding father of modern Turkey. As a result, his Kemalistic ideology was taken up by later generation of Turks in continuing with the modernization project. A similar youth political wing was also witnessed in Eastern Europe in the struggle against communist rule where young people played a great role in the fall of the Iron Curtain through their 'juventized' underground mobilizations (Kovacheva 2005). As the result, they were viewed as an active and committed group that produced new values that rejuvenate and build society (ibid).[4] It was not perhaps lack of qualified old breed politicians or overambitious tendencies that made these youths embrace politics and political governance with vigor and intensity, but possibly their sense of duty and dedication to their countries. They did not possibly see politics as an enterprise reserved only for gerontocrats, but as an avenue to national service and development, as well as international cooperation.

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[2] Cf. Marianne Flack (2009). *Political Youth Organizations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics. The Finnish Experience*. Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication, p.3

[3] For more information, see for example, http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/editorial/36293-matthew-mbu-1929-2012.html Accessed 20.3.2012

[4] See also Mahler (1983) and Mitev (1982)

Today however, researched-based evidence has argued that young people of nowadays are not interested in politics, or at least not as much as those of yesteryears. For example, youth voting during elections has dropped drastically in all regions of the world (Bergdorf 2007; Karlsson 2007; Johansson 2007; Hooghe and Stolle 2005; EC 2003). Also youth membership in political parties has declined over the years (Muxel 2001; Hooghe and Stolle 2005; Karlsson 2007; Johansson 2007). Their abstentions and/or protest votes at the same time have increased tremendously (Pleyers 2005). Even those young people who used to be politically active have now allegedly become withdrawn, and instead have invested their time and resources in nonpartisan and nonpolitical organizations and interest groups.[5]

Furthermore, an international comparative study recently conducted in 38 countries showed a high rate of disinterest and lukewarm attitude of young people towards politics. Finland, for example, was "ranked at the bottom" of other countries, followed by Sweden, Belgium, Slovenia and Norway. In other words, young Finns are said to be "not interested in politics and societal issues".[6] Only 27% of them support a political party, whereas the international average is 48%. Also, only 12% plans to join a political party in the future (as adults) while the international average is 27%. But majority (85%) however plans to vote in the future. Except this, many "are markedly more interested in organized leisure activities, such as sports and athletic clubs" (ibid) than in political activities. These findings corroborate the European Social Survey (2006) which showed similar trends around Europe. The survey argues that many young Europeans aged 16-29 "show a low interest in politics". Only 6% declared interest. Interest is said however to increase with age: 36% of people aged 30 and above was "quite interested in politics" in contrast to those below the age range. Gender difference also plays a part. Young men seem more interested in politics than young women. But overall, the level of interest was bleak. 62% of young men and 70% of young women are found to be hardly interested in politics. The survey researchers thus conclude that the "European youth is seemingly still distant from politics" (ibid).

In Africa, a similar trend is also evident. A local poll carried out in southeastern Nigeria in 2009, for example, showed that 48.3% of young people belong to a political party. But out of this figure, only 20.3% said they are active in politics,[7] which implies that more than half (i.e. 28%) is passive (Ndukwe 2011). Like young Europeans, many of them are more interested in leisure and pleasure activities as well as in nonpolitical organizations than in the political (ibid). This growing phenomenon has been interpreted as youth de-politisation (Vrcan 2002), youth political disengagement (Norris 2003), youth disenfranchisement with the current political order (Adsett 2003), and youth disillusionment with traditional political structures, institutions and actors, which has consequently led to a decline in political capital, and the rise of a 'protest generation' in contrast to the 'political generation' of their parents and grandparents (Pleyers 2005). Overall, it is now rare

[5] Cf. Timothy Bergdorf (2007). *Untapped Resources: Problems and Possibilities Pertaining to Meaningful Youth Participation*. Master's Thesis. Göteborg: Goteborg Universitet. p.4

[6] Cf. "International study of 38 countries: Civic knowledge of Finnish young people at top level", http://www.alphagalileo.org/ViewItem.aspx?ItemId=79994&CultureCode=en Accessed 17.8.2010

[7] See Soren Okocha's (2009) survey in Nigeria, "How do you socialize politically?" cited in Thaddeus Ndukwe (2011). *Political Godfathers in Nigeria. A Study of Anambra State, 1999-2006*. Master's thesis. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä. p.33

to see any political figure, including government ministers and international governance officials, within or below the age of 30.

Opinions have varied among researchers on why this is so. Some have attributed it to nature. For instance, Kuhar (2005) argues that life-cycle theories of political interest maintain that the relationship between age and interest in politics is curvilinear in nature. In other words, that as people age, their interest in politics allegedly grows. Interestingly, a study of voter turnout in Nigeria in 2007 conducted by Michael Bratton of Michigan State University, USA, also argues in similar manner, pointing out that "older people are significantly more likely to vote than youngsters".[8] Bratton did not give us any reason for this however, but a similar study conducted in South Africa by Michael Sachs, appears to confirm that age could play a role in political interest and participation. Sachs argues that voter turnout amongst the youngest category of South Africans increases as they approach middle age, and then reaches highest level (about 93%) as they approach 60 and 69 years old, but slightly declines as they grow much older.[9] He further argues that this is because interest and participation in politics naturally require an acquisition of certain social resources such as political knowledge, skills, proper integration in one's community, familiarity with parties and candidates, and good knowledge of the electoral process, which older people appear to have more and better than young people.

On the other hand, Lagos & Rose (2007) in their multi-continental survey argue that albeit older people might be more likely to vote than young people, the reason is not really of age but some other factors, like education and work. In other words, that young people are often in motion, moving between education and work and unconsciously creating technical obstacles to active politics. They also argue that when it comes to politics, young people are usually "more idealistic in their goals and thus less loyal to established traditions"[10] than adults. This makes them record a "lower interest in politics (2%)" and "lowest satisfaction with democracy (1%)"[11] than adults.

However, Casciani (2002) argues that the reason is neither age nor education and work, but the frustration that young people experience with traditional politics, political institutions, political actors and authorities who they see as deceptive, cold and unresponsive. He points out that young people often want effective and 'interesting politics'. This argument is confirmed by the opinions of some young people in an interview. They emphasize that: 'politics is very boring'; 'politicians are dangerous'; 'they are liars and dubious'; 'politics is a do-or-die affair', 'it is an avenue for embezzling public fund'; 'it is an expensive venture'; 'it is not an honorable profession', 'it belongs to old people'.[12] These allegations are also further confirmed by the findings of the National Centre for Social Research, Belfast, which argues that the biggest barrier to the Irish youth political engagement, for example, is politicians' ambiguous attitude to politics and governance. Most Irish young people, it says, "view politicians in a negative light, perceiving them as remote,

[8] See Michael Bratton (2008). "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns". *Afrobarometer Working Papers* No.99 (June): p.16.
[9] Michael Sachs (2006). "Youth and Politics in Democratic Order", http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-96209-201-1-do_topic..html Accessed 8/4/2010
[10] Cf. http://archive.idea.int/df/99df/daniela-int3.html Accessed 17.8.2011
[11] See http://archive.idea.int/df/99df/figur1.html Accessed 17.8.2011
[12] Fieldwork in Nigeria and Europe, 2010

untrustworthy, self-interested and unrepresentative of young people".[13] Pleyers (2005) also adds that this is likely because young people today are "profoundly marked by our era" – an era that is beset with political and economic crises that have made them orphans of the twentieth century ideologies which promised them brighter tomorrow but have failed. This disappointment, he argues, is further reinforced by the structural weaknesses in our representative democracies that has led to the loss of governability[14] in local and global affairs, - a phenomenon that has also apparently grown with globalization and consequently led to the widening gap between political institutions and young citizens (See also Norris 2003; Beck 1997; Touraine 1999).

On a different note, Hooghe and Stolle (2005) attribute youth de-politization to change of gear in political parties which have stopped investing money and resources on youth political organizations to attract, recruit and retain young members as they used to do before. Instead, in the face of growing media-dominated political landscape, they now delegate much of their work to the media, professional bodies and specialized forums, including also social and religious groups, to play much of those roles traditionally meant for young people in mainstream party politics. Hooghe and Stolle thus conclude that instead of arguing or alleging that young people are no more interested in politics, we should rather ask: are political parties still interested in young people? This argument also finds validity in the claims of some young people that they indeed have active interest in politics but are often not recognized or encouraged by political parties either in party affairs or in vying for electoral positions, or in being appointed to political positions in government. Instead, they are often relegated to the political background and used only for campaign rallies and menial errands (Ndukwe 2011; Luksulu 2005).

New ways of participating, or alter participation

Perhaps, in the face of all of the above situation, the youth now resort to different patterns of political expression and participation, or alter participation, which researchers summarize as political "juventization" (Kovacheva 2005), "politics of the new generation" (Mencin Cˇeplak 2002), or alter-globalization activism (Pleyers 2005) where young minds deliberate on change and innovation to create a (new) path for the future outside of traditional structures. This "politics of the new generation" mainly includes (but is not limited to) protests, demonstrations, counter summits & seminars, sit-ins, strikes and boycotts merged with youthful music, arts, sports, picnics and pleasure, and coordinated mainly through text-messaging, net-posting, chatting and net-surfing. Text-messaging and net-chatting particularly provide great avenues for essential quick discussions and knowledge-sharing, sensitization and mobilization for protests and other ad-hoc political activities. I call this digital process *e-juventization*. Thanks to the evolution and advancement of digital technology. It also played a great part in the mobilization and success of the Arab Spring because all relevant information was disseminated through the process (especially through text-messaging and facebook) in a timely and effective manner. From the point of view of political

[13] National Centre for Social Research (2000). "Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds". England, YPS. See also Smyth et al. (2004). "The Impact of Political Conflict on children in Northern Ireland". Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research. In Africa, Asia and Latin America also, a similar perception of politicians and political institutions also exists.

[14] This argument has also been postulated by Crozier et al. (1975)

socialization also, this alter participation serves as a platform for networking and multicultural exchanges (Pleyers 2005) where young people socialize with new visions of politics and ideologies different from those of their forebears as well as their parents' and grandparents'. Pleyers also argues that in this alter-participation, young people are participating in the democratic project through freedom of speech and expression, especially because their main primary aim is to provide counter power logic to existing power logic (ibid) aimed at initiating a new political order in a fast globalizing world.

Be that as it may, alter participation is however said to be creating frictions and contradictions between the "old" and "new" generation, with the latter questioning the authority of the former upon whom the traditional system has for long been laid (Georgeon 2004). In *Untapped Resources: Problems and Possibilities Pertaining to Meaningful Youth Participation*, Bergdorf (2007) argues that such a questioning is very necessary since the world has changed and is still changing, yet our political system and its mode of participation has remained the same for more than a century. To better meet the demands of a true democratic society then, as well as incorporate all voices in the process of political governance, he argues that new methods and mechanisms of expression and participation must be developed. These mechanisms and methods are the alter-participation techniques and processes already mentioned, and which have made it possible for young people to participate in the political space without fear or favor. Their 'protest politics', for example, while not new in history, has taken a new dimension today in the sense that it is characterized by astute coordination, flexibility, informality, pleasure and excitement (Wieviorka 1998) that are not commonly seen in mainstream politics. This is part of juventization - which is basically conceived as a pro-active and problem-solving youth approach in social transformation of societies[15] - and which is gradually leading to political transformation. The Arab Spring, for instance, is a case in point. Energized by their hope for a better future, the Arab youth alter participation took the form of demonstrations, shouts, songs, gestures (including placard-carrying) and political speeches, where a combination of rhetoric and lyrics were used to send their messages to those they are meant for. The same was also applicable during the 2010 Europe-wide protests[16] (including separate ones in Spain[17] and Greece respectively), the 2011 British Riot, the 2011 Israeli nation-wide protests, the 2011 youth protests in Senegal, the 2011 Algerian protests, mass demonstrations in the Philippines, China, South Korea and the US respectively, as well as the Nigerian week-long strong protests in January 2012 and a similar one in Indonesia in March 2012, and many others. And in all of these protests, the main motivation was a very deep sense of alienation from, and/or neglect in, the process of political and economic governance.

Theoretically, some youth researchers have perceived alter participation from a youth bulge perspective, arguing that it came into being because of huge young population in many countries today. But, as Gunnar Heinsohn – the proponent of youth bulge theory – clarified recently, a youth

[15] Cf. http://youth-egames.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=97 Accessed 24.3.2012. See also Lonnie R. Sherrod, *Youth activism: an international encyclopedia*. ebook, p.223

[16] See David Brunnstrom (2010). "Tens of thousands protest against austerity moves (in Europe)". *Reuters.* 29 September. This protest was held in almost all major EU cities, including Athens, Paris, London, Madrid, Lisbon, Dublin, Rome, Riga, Warsaw, Nicosia, Bucharest, Prague, Vilnius, Belgrade, and Brussels

[17] Especially at the Galician region against unpopular university reforms and Prestige oil spillage off the coast of Galicia

bulge is not just about *huge* young population, but about huge young *male* population. He argues that a youth bulge really occurs only when about "thirty to forty percent of a nation's young *males*… between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine" are involved in political and/or social uprising and violence; and that "even if these young men are well nourished and have good housing and education", a youth bulge could still occur when "their numbers grow much faster than the economy can provide"; more so, because "they (would have) become frustrated, angry, and violent" for lack of jobs or other alternative good means of livelihood, and thus are ready to be "enlisted quite easily into radical groups and terror organizations"[18] against governments and/or governance institutions. The emphasis here then is on young *males*, not on all young people, which makes this theory unable to explain alter participation (which includes both male and *female*) in a comprehensive sense. The main emphasis in alter participation is not on *gender* but on *common deprivation* and *agitation*. From this perspective, youth bulge theory cannot therefore properly apply.

Furthermore, recent developments in democratic theory have tended to link the rise of alter participation to the sociological theory of post-materialism (Kovacheva 2005). The post-materialist hypothesis has tended to link changing dimensions of political participation to a socio-cultural shift in the society (ibid). Its trends and values have also been found to involve less support for authority and traditional institutions (Blanch 2005). However, Ronald Inglehart (2008, 1997)[19] argues that the trends are much more visible in the post-industrial (affluent) societies than in industrial and pre-industrial ones. This indicates, he says, that post-industrial societies have switched from materialist values such as economic and physical security to post-materialist values such as individual autonomy, self-expression, human rights, individual improvement, personal freedom, citizen input in government decisions, and the ideal of a society based on humanism among others. He further alleges that in these societies therefore, young people seem more likely to embrace these post-materialist values faster than adults. But he calls this tendency a 'silent revolution' and a sign of intergenerational *value* change[20] rather than something more radical. Nonetheless, his emphasis is mainly on developed nations, and this seems to imply that people in developing nations are not likely to clamor for such humanistic values as *self-expression*, *citizen input in government decisions*, *personal freedom*, and *human rights* since their societies are not yet post-industrial. But recent events, especially the Arab Spring and others, have shown the contrary – that is to say that they clamor for such values. This implies that a society does not need to be post-industrial or affluent in order to long for the humanistic values necessary for personal fulfillment. Such values are desiderata for every human existence. In the foregoing therefore, we may argue that the post-materialist theory fails to explain fully the phenomenon of alter-participation today

I therefore propose that the *globalizing youth theory* can explain it fully. In this theory, I postulate that the 21st century youth is a globalizing generation, not a 'protest generation' as has been alleged. I argue that this globalizing generation has the key trappings or characteristics of being increasingly

[18] See interview with Gunnar Heinsohn by Clark Whelton on "A Demographic Theory of war: population, power and 'the slightly weird' ideas of Gunnar Heinsohn", 5th October, 2007, http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/014/185jeplm.asp Accessed 9.4.2012

[19] Inglehart is credited with developing this sociological theory of post-materialism in the 1970s

[20] See Inglehart, Ronald (1971). "The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies. *American Political Science Review* 65, 4: 991–1017

outgoing, audacious, fearless, vocal, collectivist, mundane technology-savvy[21], and resilient. Even though it is collectivist in action (through astute mobilization), it also maintains an individual autonomy in outlook. I argue that this autonomy is not at all 'a retreat to the private sphere' as Pleyers (2005:133) puts it, but the basis for new forms of commitment and new cultures of participation. Thus, in their collectivist characteristics, young people are easily connected by events around the world through mundane technologies and are united in their quest and clamor for better and improved livelihood for all regardless of countries of origin and levels of development. They believe that better livelihood can be made possible through effective political governance since politics is the center around which every other sphere of human society revolves. The inability of governments and governance institutions to live up to this expectation today has thus continued to ignite their anger and fuel sensitization and mobilization in varied forms such as vibrant demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and abstentions from voting and other sundry political activities. Pleyers (2005) could therefore be right in his argument that the youth of today are "profoundly marked by our era" – an era that is beset with political and economic crises that have made them orphans of the twentieth century ideologies that promised them brighter tomorrow but have failed. With their present and future life under threat, and their anger high, the globalizing youth are therefore bent in securing their future from traditional structures. In *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Della Porta and Tarrow *(*2004) examine the communication and interaction of non-state actors (such as the youth) who operate spontaneously, inspired by grievances against governments and governance institutions, and facilitated by improved communication technology, advanced means of transport and less-hassle travels across borders, and discovered that it has advanced rapidly because these non-state actors are autonomous from the state and therefore could oppose government and institutional policies with intensity and vigor, making their actions have profound effects on global governance, democracy and development itself.

Notwithstanding, we might need to ask a crucial question: can alter-participation eventually help the youth achieve a tangible and lasting solution to their aspirations, especially in the political arena? Has their 'protest politics', for example, had any tangible impact on governments and institutions against whom they are directed to? In many instances, this does not seem to be the case. In Spain's Galicia, for example, Blanch (2005) tells us that large youth-filled protests, demonstrations, 'boycotts, lock-ins, and graffiti' against the government's severe university reforms, oil spillage off the Galician coast and the Iraq war endorsement did not yield any significant result, and neither did it even deter the ruling party then from winning an incoming municipal elections despite large anti-campaigns in this regard. No doubt, this indicates an essential loophole in alter participation. Kovacheva (2005) argues that if young people protest on specific issues but at the end do not have any serious impact on governments and/or governance institutions, this could contribute further to their anger, disaffection and further alienation from politics and other civic engagements. Sometimes, the youth even get themselves in trouble in such protests as it, for example, happened after the 2011 British Riot when many young people were arrested and charged to court for public disorder. Although the Arab Spring was deemed quite successful by many due to change of regimes, there is a single reason however why it should probably not be totally deemed so. Tanter and Midlarsky (1967) argue that a successful revolution occurs only when, as a result of a challenge

[21] Mundane technology includes mobile phone, texting, internet, social media such as facebook, twitter, etc.

to the governmental elite, the insurgents are able to occupy principal roles within the structure of political authority. In this regard, we may ask: did the Arab youths occupy principal roles within the structure of political authority after ousting the old regimes? Were they incorporated in the new regimes? Was it not the same old brigade politicians and/or soldiers – some of whom are allies or estranged allies of the ousted regimes - who occupied those roles and are still holding sway? Has there been any significant change in what the youth had agitated for? Has any of their grievances been addressed? Shadi Hamid (2012) argues in his "Promise of Arab Spring eluding Egypt?" that many Egyptians are now disillusioned because the promises of better political and economic governance upon which the revolution was made have now eluded many. He further asserts that currently, some old autocrats have "repackaged themselves as newly believing democrats" in the Egyptian political space[22] while giving no room to "the children of the revolution" to take part beyond being wooed to support their (i.e. the autocrats') candidacies.[23] In this circumstance, how then could the youth learn the rubrics of governance and leadership? How could they be part of decision/policy-making? Would they continue to be at the political periphery and the fringe of governance? Pääkönen (2012) argues that the distribution of power and the structures of the society do not often correspond with the demography, with the youth often at a disadvantage. The only success that can be attributed to the Arab Spring is the evolving power, determination, coordination, boldness and resilience of young people who made it happen. Yet, because they are still relegated to the background; still at the political periphery, still at the fringe of governance from where they launched their revolutions in the first place, something more tangible and durable would need to be done.

Conclusion: What can be done?

If young people are pushed to the political periphery and/or fringe of governance advertently or inadvertently, or they themselves willingly choose to be there for any reason(s), it would have serious political implication for the future. Basically, it portends danger for the possibility of rejuvenating governance, democracy and development around the world. It also entails serious security problem. With their growing political disenfranchisement, there is the possibility that when the present crop of political leaders retire and/or die, for example, there could be a yawning political leadership *competence vacuum* due to potential lack of competent young hands to take over the mantle of political leadership and governance. A situation like this could trigger more power thuggery, more coup d'etats, resulting in political anarchy and leading to all manner of insurgencies. Such a situation would in turn affect, strain and jeopardize national developments, transnational relations and international security, and could lead to regional and/or global war(s) that could be more complex and devastating than previous wars. Thanks in part also to all manner of nuclear weapons being developed today. Another effect could be the crumbling of the political, social and moral fabrics of the society. Life in itself would fall apart since the center of society can no longer hold. All kinds of abhorrent crimes would surface and seek legal recognition. Survival of the fittest would become the rule of the day. These anomalies could last for decades if not centuries, and would need strong moral and political will and power to redress and rebuild.

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[22] Cf. http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/29/opinion/hamid-egypt/index.html?iid=article_sidebar Accessed 30.5.2012

[23] See Yolande Knell, "Egypt candidates hope to woo children of the revolution". *BBC* News, Cairo, 28 May 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18243317 Accessed 28.5.2012

In a situation like this, alter participation might go into oblivion, unable to checkmate the occurrences. We cannot therefore deem it a replacement of, or an alternative to, traditional and/or institutional forms of politics; more so, because its pattern of political expression and activism are at the *horizontal* level rather than *vertical*. In other words, it can neither lead to competent political leadership nor the process of political (and economic) governance for that matter. Even though young people today seem to understand that a better way to influence substantial change in the society is through influencing political structures, because as already pointed out, politics is the center around which every other sphere of the society revolves, they however seem not to understand yet that this cannot happen, at least not substantially and sustainably, if their manner of approach (or counter power logic) remains horizontal – that is, mainly based on protests and demonstrations and other social forms, and not on the *vertical* (i.e. on direct political involvement) which leads to political leadership, decision/policy-making and governance process. It is in fact important to ask here if the best way to influence governance is by being part of decision/policy-making or decision/policy-protesting; the mainstream or the periphery; protesting from inside or outside?

Azikiwe (1973) argues that democracy and politics cannot develop well or be better transformed if young people shy away from *mainstream* politics. By mainstream, he does not strictly mean the *traditional* but rather *full involvement* in realpolitik in whatever legitimate means. And it does not matter if this is done through traditional or non-traditional method/approach so long as the approach is or can be legitimate enough to bring people to government and/or political decision-making process. Such a political involvement could stimulate young people at an early stage to learn relevant political skills such as negotiation, decision/policy-making, conflict resolution (YIMD 2007) as well as broad diplomatic power play abilities. It will also stimulate attention for youth issues and create an incentive environment for a long-term societal development. In addition, it could also make young people to no more, or rarely, use *violent* means to show their disgusts in the society since they are now incorporated tangibly in societal governance and must have learned the aforementioned political skills which are also necessary for good inter-human relations (ibid).

Therefore, if alter participation can be adjusted from horizontal to vertical, it would achieve better and long-lasting results in the future than it is currently. In other words, rather than always dwell on protests and demonstrations, the youth should aim at getting fully involved in *realpolitik*. However, since some of them have argued that they indeed have great interest in politics but are always discriminated against in 'adult' political parties by party officials who see them as mere instruments for campaign rallies and menial errands (Ndukwe 2011; Luksulu 2005), formation of their own political parties seems the best way out. With their own parties formed and registered, they should field their own candidates during elections and vie for any electoral positions that they are eligible for. With their strong numerical strength,[24] they could win any electoral positions they set their eyes on. Shying away from *realpolitik*/mainstream politics, or being denied the chance to do so by anybody or institution therefore, would amount to gross 'democratic deficit' as Ayco (2008) has, for

[24] The Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has in its *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, argued that people 24 years old or younger make up almost half of the world's 7 billion population, and that their percentage in some developing countries is even already at its peak.

example, argued.[25] Ayco makes it clear that the youth should be given electoral opportunities since it is their patriotic and moral duty to run for political positions aimed at building a better society for all. Bergdorf (2007) also points out that they must now be seen as *partners*, no longer as *problems*, of society, because they also possess the unique *characteristics* and *abilities* that could be utilized for the elevation (and rejuvenation) of society within the realm of political governance.

Interestingly, some political leaders seem to have recognized these characteristics and abilities. For instance, in the 17th ordinary session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State, President Jonathan of Nigeria told his counterparts that there is "*the need for greater integration of the youth in political dialogue and development initiatives* on the (African) continent".[26] Efforts must therefore be scaled-up, he says, "towards the Pan-African Youth Union and encourage the participation of African youths in national and continental dialogue" in this regard because not only are they future leaders, they are also viable agents for peace, stability and prosperity in the world of today (ibid).

To concretely help the youth get involved in *vertical* political process then, I suggest the following key steps (in addition also to the ones already discussed above):

1. There should be a legalized quota (about 25%) for young people in all electoral positions (including political appointments at all levels of government) in all countries as well as global governance institutions, just as there are similar quotas currently for women in line with the *Beijing Affirmative Action* for women (1995).[27] In line with this *Affirmative Action*, women are usually given priority in certain vacancies in governments, regional and international organizations, like in the following words: 'Women are encouraged to apply, and where women and men have equal qualifications, women would be preferred'. Such a priority could also be given to young people, especially in the wake of increasing youth unemployment today and its attendant restiveness. For example, a vacancy advert in governments, regional and international organizations could also read: 'Young people are encouraged to apply. Where young people and (older) adults have equal qualifications, young people would be preferred'. John Dewey (1916) calls them 'the nucleus of the society',[28] that hold the key to the continuous existence of present and future societies.

2. A law would need to be passed by national parliaments to make election campaigns less expensive generally so that youth political parties can compete on level-playing ground with 'adult' political parties, unencumbered financially. Where such a decree could not be made, governments could map out Youth Campaign Fund (as part of its Election Fund) to support the electioneering of youth electoral contestants. Such a thing was, for example, done for

[25] By democratic deficit, Ayco means the lack of a concrete voice of a people or group in the political/democratic governance. For more information, see Ramon T. Ayco (2008). "Youth Participation in Local Governance", http://www.scribd.com/doc/12914338/Youth-Participation-in-Governance Accessed 16.5.2011
[26] Juliana Taiwo (2011). "Youths our greatest assets, Jonathan tells African leaders". *The Sun* newspaper, Abuja, July 3
[27] This *Affirmative Action* argues that women should be given equal treatment with men (and in some cases even priority) in all spheres of society. Cf. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fpexcerpts.htm 20.5.2012
[28] See John Dewey [1916]. *Democracy and Education*, http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DewDemo.html Accessed 20.2.2009.

women electoral aspirants of all political parties in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections by the federal government. A total of N100 million (c. US$900,000) was disbursed to all of them to aid their electioneering.[29]

I have strong belief that if the above suggestions are adopted and implemented, the possibility of young people's active participation in political governance would be enhanced, and the future of competent political leadership guaranteed. Steve Sharp[30] argues that what we often see among young people today is that if they are *involved* in decision-making and are listened to, their overall sense of participation in the society improves even more rapidly and broadly.

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European Social Survey (2006). "Youth Political Engagement", http://ess.nsd.uib.no/ess/round3/ Accessed 4.8.2009

[29] See Nkechi Onyedika & Laolu Adeyemi (2011). "Govt Gives 100m To Female Candidates". *The Guardian*, Abuja, 26 March. The People's Democratic Party (the ruling party) also let their female candidates to obtain nomination forms (which usually cost between the equivalent of $500 – $10,000, depending on which electoral position) free of charge. A similar thing can be done for those youths who choose to remain with 'adult' political parties.

[30] Cited in See Casciani, Dominic (2002). "Youth wants interesting politics", http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2493485.stm Accessed 23.8.2011

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