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THE PRACTICE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS. PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE FROM MWANZA CITY, TANZANIA

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Abstract

Worldwide it has been reported the challenge of the decline of youth political participation in democratic elections. Hence the study aims to investigate the practice of local government elections among youth in Mwanza City Tanzania East Africa. A snowball sampling technique was applied to select 123 youths as a sample in study areas. Quantitative data was collected by using an interview schedule and qualitative data were collected by using Focus Group Discussions and key informant interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and qualitative data was analyzed by using content analysis. The study findings showed that youth competence, especially knowledge of technical know-how and financial resources, affected the practice of youth participation in local government elections. The study concludes that the possession of financial resources and knowledge by youth are important practices in local government elections. Therefore, the study recommends policymakers and political parties provide training on elections regulations and financial resources to support youth practices in local government elections.

Key words: Local government election, youth, financial resources, competence

1. Introduction

Youth political participation has emerged in recent years as a crucial new focus of efforts to enhance democracy worldwide (IPU, 2015). Political parties are especially well placed to encourage the participation of youth in democratic elections. Worldwide the existing literature demonstrates that several factors affected youth participation in politics. For example, the factors that influence youth political participation vary by region in Europe (Weiss, 2020; Paschou1 and Mogollón, 2022). For instance, previous studies have reported a decline in youth participation in elections in Western and Central Europe (Cammaerts, 2014; Pospieszna et al., 2022) In the United Kingdom; the survey discovered that youth turnout was the lowest in more than a decade in democratic elections (Sturgis & Jennings 2020) because of youth feeling of exclusion in government policy, political habits of an individual and political inequality in terms of ethnicity and wealth (Taylor, 2021). In Scotland, Huebner (2021) found that voting at 16 years old increased youth participation in the 2014 independence referendum. In Eastern European countries the association membership and established institutions influenced youth participation in democratic elections (Weiss, 2020). The reported

cases of the decline of youth political participation in Europe have also happened in other areas, particularly Africa.

Africa has 1.341 billion people in 2020, with 533.5 million (39.8%) of them being children under the age of 15, and 755.92 million (56.4%) being populations under the age of 24 (Kaba, 2020). This fact indicates that the population of African countries is becoming more youthful. The level of youth participation in politics in Africa is not consistent, because it differs from country to country (Hartmann and Biira, 2021). This is because economic and social expectations regarding what is appropriate for boys and girls have an impact on youth political engagement in Africa (Plan International, 2022). According to other studies, African politicians employ young people as pawns in their electoral campaigns by organising large-scale demonstrations (Hartmann and Biira, 2021). This is regarded as informal political participation (Koivula, 2021; McMahon et al., 2023; Alm, 2015). Furthermore, gender norms also have an impact on youth political participation in Africa since it defines what society considers appropriate for girls and boys. However, the youth's influence on national politics remains limited compared to older generations (Zhang, 2022).

Previous studies on democratic elections focused on youth participation in the general elections specifically in voting (Kwan, 2021; Ting and Ahmad, 2021; Mbulaje et al., 2021) and in informal political participation especially activists, online politics, demonstrations (Ting and Ahmad, 2021; Obisesan, 2022). However, Alm (2015) asserts that voting and other political activities beyond voting give opportunities for youth to communicate the political message to politicians. Additionally, Verbal et al., (1995) contend that time, money and civic skills are fundamental personal resources that citizens need to participate in political activities. Moreover, competencies refer to expertise to carry out the practices and differ from individual to individual (Shove et al., 2012). In this study, competence relates to skills, know-how and correlated techniques. This study focused on technical know-how linked to youth practices associated with local government elections held in 2019 in Mwanza City, Tanzania. Taking into consideration the case of Tanzania most of the previous studies focused on youth political participation in general elections especially voter registration and voting (Kinyondo and Pelizzo, 2019; Asante et al., 2019; Tanzania Election Watch, 2021). However, scant information exists on how youth practice in terms of competence and their limited resources particularly financial resources influenced other democratic elections specifically the 2019 local government election. Therefore, this study investigated the practice of youth participation in local government elections in Tanzania with evidence from Mwanza City. It is expected that the results obtained from this research will offer valuable insights to political organizations and decision-makers, aiding them in effectively utilizing the skills possessed by youth, especially in terms of technical expertise. The goal is to strategically tap into the potential of young individuals to bring about positive change within political arenas.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in Nyamagana District, Mwanza region Tanzania East Africa. Nyamagana District is one of the seven districts of the Mwanza region. It is bordered to the north by Ilemela District to the east by Magu District to the South by Misungwi District and to the west by Mwanza Bay of Lake Victoria. Nyamagana District was selected because has a large number of followers of both ruling political party famous known as Chama cha Mapinduzi in English the party of the revolution and the opposition party Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), which refer to the party for democracy and progress

in English (Alm, 2015). The study employed a cross-sectional research design in which one or more groups of subjects are studied at one point in time. One independent variable is the focus of the cross-sectional study and one or more dependent variables (Creswell, 2018). The sample size consisted of 123 respondents in the Nyegezi ward. These respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The sample size was determined based on the assertion by Bailey (1994) who argues that 30 is the minimum number of cases for a sub-sample. This study took a sample of size 123 and used ≥ 30 sample size in each case (street) as recommended by Bailey (1994). Furthermore, Delice (2010) contends that the sample size range of 20 to 50 sub-groups is sufficient for a quantitative study.

The interview schedule was administered to 123 respondents to capture quantitative and qualitative data on the level of competence (knowledge) and sources of financial resources used by youth in the 2019 local government elections. Moreover, the qualitative data were collected by using key informants and interviews with political leaders. Four (4) Focus Group Discussions were conducted in each street, composed of ten respondents, half male and female. Additionally, secondary data was collected through document reviews such as journals and reports. Moreover, the study applied both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. Quantitative data was analysed by using descriptive statistics to establish frequency and percentages while qualitative data was analysed by content analysis. Qualitative data were analysed on the basis of major themes that come up in the discussions.

3. Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Youth

Results in Table 1, show that males made up 50.5% of the respondents, while females made up 49.5%. In terms of location, Nkamba and Nyabulogoya streets had half-male and half female respondents, respectively. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (97.7%) were between the ages of 18 and 30, with the remaining (20.3%) falling between the ages of 30 and 35. In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents (73.9%) were single, while only 26% were married. In terms of education, those with a primary education and those with a vocational education were quite close at 21.9% and 23.6%, respectively, while those with a secondary education were 37.4% and those with a university education were 1% (Table 1). Moreover, because other political parties boycotted the elections, only the ruling political party CCM youth participated in the practice of local government elections in the year 2019.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Youth

Socio-economic characteristics		Location				Total
		Kunzenza	Igubinya	Nkamba	Nyabulogoya	
Gender	Female	13(43.8)	18(54.5)	15(50)	15(50)	61(49.5)
	Male	17(56.2)	15(45.5)	15(50)	15(50)	62(50.5)
Age	18-30	24(81.2)	24(72.7)	26(86.7)	24(80)	98(79.7)
	30-35	6(18.8)	9(27.3)	4(13.3)	6(20)	25(20.3)
Marital status	Married	11(37.5)	6(18.2)	8(26.7)	7(23.3)	32(26)
	Single	19(62.5)	27(81.8)	22(73.4)	23(76.7)	91(73.9)
Level of education	Primary	9(31.2)	7(21.2)	7(23.3)	4(13.2)	27(21.9)
	Secondary	4(12.5)	15(45.5)	11(36.7)	16(53.3)	46(37.4)
	Vocational training	9(31.2)	7(21.2)	9(30.0)	4(13.3)	29(23.6)
	University	8(25.0)	4(12.1)	3(10.0)	6(20.0)	21(17.1)
Political party	CCM	30(100)	33(100)	30(100)	30(100)	123(100)

Figures in brackets are percentages

The Level of Competence among Youth in local government

Knowledge of the timeframe for conducting local government elections

The knowledge variable was used to measure the level of competence among young people who voted in the 2019 election. According to the study findings, 86.3% of respondents were aware of when elections were held and correctly understood that local government elections were held every five years in Tanzania. Furthermore, it was discovered during Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on all streets in Nyegezi Ward that youths were knowledgeable about when local government elections were held due to the recruitment of political party members, mass media advertising, and social media platforms.

Furthermore, 13.7% of young people were without knowledge of when local government elections were held. During the FGD, it was also highlighted that youth claimed neglect and the perceived attitude that politics is useless to them since it does not solve their problems, particularly unemployment, but rather serves as a vehicle for senior politicians to achieve political office. This study's findings are consistent with those of Blockmans and Russack (2020), who discovered that Northern and Eastern countries have significantly lesser awareness (35.2% on average), with the UK having the lowest level of knowledge at 13.9%.

Furthermore, the study evaluated knowledge on whether youth were aware of some election regulations for local government elections held in the year 2019. Krennerich (2020) affirms that election laws have to be specific, clear, and simple for electoral authorities, candidates, and voters to grasp. Understanding elections regulations help youth to engage or disengage in democratic elections. The study revealed that 58.3 % of the respondents were knowledgeable and they answered correctly 21 years and above was the legal age for youth to contest for various posts in the elections. Nevertheless, 41.7 % of the respondents didn't know the legal age for a youth to contest for a political post in the 2019 local government elections.

The provision of civic education via radio, newspaper, television, and the display of posters in various parts of local government offices and in streets served as an avenue for the acquisition of information and mastering of regulations that guide local government elections in the local government elections held in the year 2019. There were also youth who were unaware that 21 years of age or older was the legal age to run for local government political posts.

On the other hand, it was confirmed during FGDs and key informants' interviews that the age for contesting for local government office is discriminatory because it limits the age category ranging between 18 to 20 years old and does not have the right to contest for local government political posts. Youth in FGDs were of the opinion that in Tanzania youth begin at the age of 18 to 35 years old. This is in contrary to Tanzanian practice, where young people aged between 15 to 35 years are treated as youth and participate in various development activities (URT, 2007). For example, CCM ruling party cell leader from Nyabulugoya had to say this;

"...The age limit for running for political office in local government elections is discriminatory. This was something I saw as a significant challenge among youth. What about young people who finished primary school but were unable to continue their education at higher levels such as secondary school, college, and so on? Some of them recently turned 20 years old, have lived their whole lives on this street, and have considerable experience in street problems and priorities. They cannot, however, run for office until they are 21 years old or older, according to the local government election regulations. ...".

Similarly, only Chama cha Mapinduzi the ruling political party participated in the local government elections while the rest boycotted the elections and insisted on the demand for a free and fair electoral commission. The ruling political party CCM held training and awareness seminars with their supporters, particularly the youth, about election regulations. In the study area, Chama cha Mapinduzi leaders raised concern about youth claims of bias in the qualifications for contesting for political posts in local government elections. For example, one of the CCM leaders at Nkamba Street pointed out that;

"...I remember a young man in Nkamba Street who was a 19-year-old who completed ordinary secondary education. He approached me and complained that the election laws disallowed him from standing for the position of street chairperson. Even though, the young man claimed that he was lawfully eligible to vote under the 1977 constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania..."

The study's findings are consistent with those of UNDP (2012), which concluded that people under the age of 35 are uncommon in positions of official political posts. It was also revealed that in one-third of the entire world's nations, qualification for the national legislative body begins at the age of 25, and MPs are often considered to as 'young' if they are between the ages of 35 and 40. These findings are most likely the result of restricted opportunities for youth to participate in effective decision making and a lack of resources.

Youth knowledge of the importance of local government elections

The result indicates that 98.2% of respondents reported that the importance of local government is to serve the community (Table 2). The main reason for this result includes youth being aware that through elections they put in place leaders to guide them in development activities. The results indicated that three questions scored more than 80% including questions related to the local government which brings development to

the community, fulfilling the laws, regulations and constitutions, presenting the citizens and getting the one whom we want to lead (Table 2). The reason for this finding is the increase in platforms for disseminating information about local government elections. This platform includes social media, radio and television, seminars and training provided to fourth through their political parties. Berthin (2014) argue that knowledge is an important element to effectively influence decision making in politics. The study findings are consistent with those of Berthin (2014), who discovered that in Latin America, particularly Nicaragua, Colombia, Costa Rica, and the Dominica Republic, youth lack the knowledge and basic abilities required to operate in the growing complex environment of local politics.

Table 2: Youth knowledge of the importance of local government elections

Importance	Kunzenza	Igubinya	Nkamba	Nyabulogoya	Total
	n=30	n=33	n=30	n=30	n=123
To solve community problems	8(25)	20(60.6)	18(60)	20(60.6)	70(56.9)
To bring development to people	17(56.2)	14(42.4)	21(70)	22(73)	75(60.6)
To get responsible and accountable leaders	24(81.2)	25(75.8)	21(70)	18(60)	87(70.6)
To serve the community	28(93.8)	33(100)	29(96.7)	30(100)	121(98.2)
To fulfill the laws, regulations and constitutions	28(93.8)	32(97)	22(73.3)	28(93.3)	110(89.0)
To get representative of the citizen	21(68.8)	27(81.8)	25(83.3)	30(100)	105(85.3)

Figures in brackets are percentages K= Kunzenza I=Igubinya N=Nkamba Ny=Nyabulogoya

Youth Financial Contributions to Local Government Elections

The respondents were asked whether they supported other youth in terms of financial support who contested for political office in the local government elections held in the year 2019. The results indicated that 77.1% of youth supported youth financially while the rest 22.9 did not offer any financial support. Those who supported others financially indicated they had three sources of money including family 37%, own source 19% and friends 19% (Figure 1). Equally important it was reported during Focus group discussions at Igubinya and Kunzenza streets that the causes of failure among youth not to support each other during local government elections in 2019 were lack of employment and inadequate financial support from family, political parties and friends. The study findings are similar to that of Restless Development (2012) which revealed that youth in Sierra Leone face limited financial, logistical support, and lack clear decision-making bodies in the practice of local government elections. Furthermore, Berthin (2014) discovered that in Latin American countries such as Colombia, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, young people's motivation to become politically active in local government elections is negatively impacted by conditions of disparity and vulnerability. Moreover, issues of livelihood, such as unemployment and poverty, impede youth participation in local government elections.

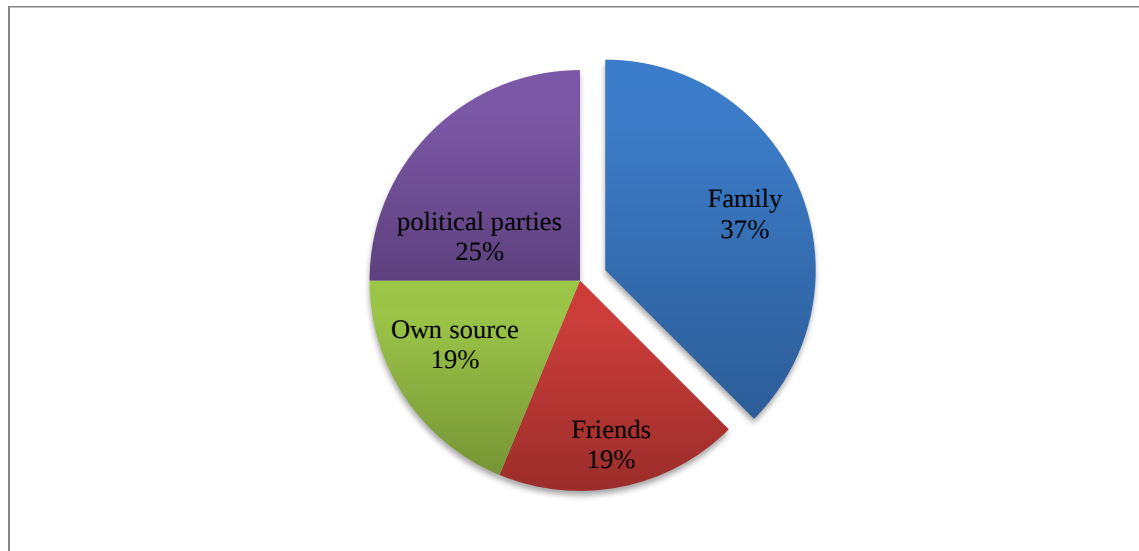


Figure 1: Sources of Financial Resources for Youth Participation in Local Government Elections

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

First, the study concludes that the practice of youth participation in the year 2019 local government elections in Mwanza City, Tanzania depended more on the use of competence particularly knowledge and skills and capability of financial resources. Secondly, the mandated age entitled to contest for political office in local government elections is controversial as some youth think they have been marginalized and restricted through biased election regulations. Based on the study findings the study recommends political parties to strengthen training on youth understanding of their role in political posts in local government election. Secondly, the study recommends the amendment of local government election regulations specifically the reduction of age for contesting local government political posts from 21 years to 18 years. Lastly, the study recommends that political parties in Tanzania should assign additional financial resources towards training youth in civic education and providing financial support for their active participation in local government elections.

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