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Assessment of Political Participation and Representation of Youths' in the Politics of Ondo State Nigeria (2003-2018)

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Abstract: ***The research work examined Youths' participation and representation in politics and decision-making process of Ondo State from 2003-2018. Available and existing literatures showed that Youths represent about half of Nigeria's population, just as in Ondo State. The research investigates the inversely relations of Youths' population compared to leadership positions occupied in Ondo State especially at the legislature and Executive levels in the years under study. The study adopts theory of political participation as its theoretical framework to midwife the work. In addition, research methodology comprises the use of both primary and secondary data as the primary data derived from the use of interview and survey research with emphases on the administration and analysis of well-structured questionnaire. Also, with the use of statistics such as percentage representation, frequency table and pictorial representation. The research also examined the roles of environmental factors, youths exhorbitant behaviours, societal structures and material facts that affect youths political participation and representation in Ondo State and the nation at large. From public policy perspectives, the findings of the research study provided veritable tools/insights for researchers, public policy analysist, Electoral agencies/reformers, political parties, politicians and Nigeria in the quest for Youths involvement in politics and leadership positions. Equally, the outcome of the research study enhanced future research work and discourse on democracy, Youths participation and representation in Ondo State particular and Nigeria in general.***

Keywords: Election, Democracy, Participation, Representation, Youths.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the assumptions of participatory forms of governance and development is that greater

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participation will allow more inclusive inputs into decision-making processes, which in turn lead to better decision outputs. The heart of the assumption is a link between participation and representation, such that greater participation will also lead to better, more informed forms of representation. Systematic and regular consultation is therefore a necessary democratic compliment to the electoral process. It leads to better decisions, participation and better citizens. It can serves an educative functions which strengthen local democratic leadership and capabilities and which also re-invigorates trust in the democratic process. (Gaventa 2004). According to Gauba (2007), Political participation denotes the active involvement of individuals (youths) and groups in the governmental processes affecting their lives. When citizens themselves play an active role in the process of formulation and implementation of public polices and decision, their activities 'are termed to be political participation (Gauba 2007).

In the literature of political analysis about democratization, politics and youths, theorists/scholars such as David (2015), Ojo (2008) Mustapha (2017), Lamprianou (2013), Quintelier (2007), Forbrig (ed) (2005), Rehfield (2011) have commented on the contributions of the youths to political engagement and in active/ elective politics. With the "Not-Too - Young -To-Run" Law in place in Nigeria, the youths have been empowered to take their leadership positions in the country and in Ondo state political landscape as decision makers. Similarly what is obtainable in France where President Emmanuel Macron is 40 years old, Canada Prime minister, Pierre James is under 50 years, Sebastian Kurz, of Austria is 32 years and, Emil Dimitriev of Macedonia is 40 years and others have use their youthful ages involve in the politics of their countries (Adetiloye,2018:4). In Nigeria, youths determination in terms of ages could be between 15 and 24, as these ages groups later transform to the active labour force of 24 to 44 age group. According to UNESCO's interpretation, a youth is a person between the ages of 15 and 24 years (UNESCO,nd). In addition to the above, on age, the new law pegged the age qualification (for examples) President from 40-35. Governor from 35 to 30; Senator from 35 to 30, House of representative membership from 30 to 25; and State House of Assembly membership from 30 to 25. This calls for merriment because the new law has reduced to an extent the constitutional barrier that stopped some vibrant youths from achieving their dreams, and contributions to the socio-economic advancement of Nigeria through their political participation and representation (Fabiyi 2018).

According to Forbrig (2005) as Cited in Omilusi & Adefemi, (2016:13) that:

Political participation addresses all possible forms of youth involvement in the structures and processes of democratic decision making. It thus relates to the input of young people, individually or collectively, to democratic politics. This input is clearly conditioned by the extent to which democratic institutions are open to the Concerns, interests and involvement of young people, whose participation will largely depend on whether or not they see their voice sufficiently reflected in the political process and its outcomes. In turn, democracy also places a more general demand on young people to accept, comprehend and develop democratic institutions, even if issues process and outcomes are not always to their liking and immediate interest. Youth participation requires permanent accessibility on the part of conditions, but also sustained engagement on the part of young people.

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Conventionally, youths are under-represented in political and leadership positions inspite of the fact that youths constitute almost 60 percent of the world's total population, even in nascent democracies in Africa such as South Africa, Uganda, Senegal, Egypt, Ghana etc far better unlike what is obtainable in Nigeria in its politics and governance. The case of youths being under-represented could be attributed to poverty, apathy, culture-bound, unemployment, education, human right where all these indicators proven the exclusion of youths in politics.

To boost the importance and prominence of youths in Nigeria, there have been a lot of Non-governmental organization NGO's, Advocacy groups, government initiatives programmes on the part of the youths which include, Youths Initiative For Advocacy and Growth (YIAGA), National Youth Council of Nigeria, African Youth Growth Foundation etc.

Problem Statement and Justification of Study

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2017:56), the total population of Ondo state is 4,671,695, out of which 2,184.847 are youths. By implication, the youths constitute half of the population and form a formidable force or block votes in the electoral pattern of voting, giving it more electoral strength in electioneering, political participation and in decision making circles However, the table below indicates it's gross under representation in Ondo State House of Assembly between 2003 and 2018.

Table 1:
Source: Field work, 2019.

S/N	Period	No. of Ondo State House of Assembly Membership	No of youths in Ondo state House of Assembly Membership	Remark %
1	2003-2007	26	1	-
2	2007-2011	26	-	-
3	2011-2015	26	-	-
4	2015-2018	26	-	-
	Total	104	01	-

Note: The above table excludes all other political offices and voting patterns

Similarly, at the State Executive Council level, it is to be noted that none of the youths have occupied the exalted Executive positions of Governor and Deputy Governor since 2003 to date. Likewise, all the representatives both at House of Representatives and the Senate are exemption of the youths. With the inverse relations of youths to adults (men and women) in political positions it has given rise to central questions:

- How could youth's participation in politics and governance of Ondo State be improved?
- How could youth's economic/financial base be improved considering that stable and strong financial muscles are major factors in Nigerian Politics?
- How could the youth's participation in politics, governance (Grass- root politics) and general national development be improved both in Nigeria and in Ondo State?

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- When did Nigeria make 50% affirmative action in favour of the youth in terms of specific elective positions of political representation?

Nigeria ranks behind in terms of youths representation comparatively with Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zambia and Morocco. Several research studies have been conducted on politics, democracy and development with special focus on youths political participation and representation in the political landscape. Lagos and Rose (2002) noted that in new democracies, younger generations are faced with the challenge of creating stability in the place of chronic instability of the past. Youth can be seen as having distinctive political interests, more inclined to change than older generations, more idealistic in their goals and less loyal to established traditions. Mengistu (2016) observed that in Africa, youths participation in voting and election processes have shown a decreasing trend since few years ago, whether in political parties or social institutions, youth are less participating. The non-inclusivity of the political parties programmes is one of the fundamental reason for the low participation of the youths / young people in such relevant areas. Even though youths' participation is not much pronounced in Africa, but their will and desire in the day to day social, economic and political activities of their countries remains high. The current research is topical and justifiable on the need to further investigate youths political participation and representation in nascent and consolidated democracy like Nigeria. The study was useful and be of immense benefits /contributions to political scientists, social analysts, Electoral agencies, public policy analysist, Economic planners in Ondo state and Nigeria in general. Furthermore, the study was able to highlights and filled in the major gaps in previous studies pertaining to democracy, youths and politic in Ondo State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Objectives of the Study

- Examined the level of youth participation in politics of Ondo State.
- Interrogated the efficacy of youth participate in legislative arm of the representation in the politics of Ondo State.
- Determined the degree of involvement of youth representation in some selected towns in some local government areas of Ondo, Nigeria.
- Discussed the reasons for the exclusion of youth participation and representation in Ondo State, Nigeria.

2. RELATED WORK

With enormous literature on youth participation across the world, particularly in Nigeria, scholars and writers have explored various dimensions of participation and representation. Adejare (2023) observed that Nigeria gives basic room for youth representation in governance to a relatively degree of sense of belonging. Ekot & Momoh (2024) noted that youth in politics is a contentious matter since the return to democracy where the quest for participation has been resounding and inspiring to the Political system. While Okibe (2002) observed that despite the evils of party system in Nigeria with respect to corruption, political

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crisis and electoral rigging, youth still seek greater participation in policies as one of the ways to end the ills in the system.

Literature Review

The expanding literature on the youths participation and representation has emphasized a critical linkage between youths and participation/representation in politics of Nigeria and in Ondo State. The basis of literature review is to provide theoretical perspective for the research study, numerous research studies and publications in the areas of democracy, governance and youths participation and representation in politics in Nigeria. Many publications that focus on the study have been written by different scholars which includes: Oluchi (2014) who observed that democracy and political participation are two concepts that are inter-woven, as participation may be direct or indirect which refers to the different ways in which the public express opinions and exert influence on politics, economic and other social decisions while democracy, based on mass participation and political sovereignty. Falade (2014) noted that political participation particularly in the electoral process is a fundamental requirement of representative democracy, while Mednet (2014) observed that the participation of many youths in the movements calling for the change in the political system had a big impact on the lives of the community members, fosters a sense of citizenship and make policy processes more transparent and accountable towards young people. Again, Tekindal (2017) noted that youth participation is very important for modern societies as well. This is because social exclusion and youth participation are considered to be two opposing concepts and it is emphasized that social inclusion policies cannot be successful unless they ensure youth participation, while Bincof (2018) commented that youth political participation is one of the most vital tools to promote good governance, strengthen and safeguard political inclusion and democracy. Omede (2017) concluded in her findings that youths are likely to engage in conventional mode of participation than unconventional mode with variations. Apart from age, local government of residence, years of residing in the local government, level of education, marital status and occupation have significant influence on youth political participation.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts theory of political participation as its theoretical framework to midwife the work. The theory of political participation in democracy was developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and later promoted by J. S. Mill and G. H. Cole, who argued that political participation is indispensable for the realization of a just society. It aimed at providing empirical answers to the questions derived from normative political theory. It is noted that all members of a political community should be represented in the political system both in a substantive and descriptive sense. The ideational approach of populism is equipped to theories on the relationship between populism and participation while research on electoral participation first circulated around the expansion of the suffrage and other citizenship rights (Teorell, 2006:792). Political participation can be understood from two theoretical perspectives: the constructive approach that affects the condition of society essentially and constructively. It sees it as an important component and a means of bringing stability between the social masses and those of the representatives or the policy makers as broad masses of

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people overcome their dissatisfaction and frustration to construct better situation, while the critical approach notes that mass participation is not important as this may result in chaos and disorder in the society through political participation, citizens are allowed to express their negative emotions to flourish and such participation is not significant(Vermani,2001:365).
Amongst the various thinkers, theorists and propounders of political participation include, Schumpter 1942, Per Riker 1982, Albrecht 2008, Teorell 2006, Kaage 1979, Marsh 1979, Mambrioge 1959, Held 2010, Monffe 1985, Morris Rosenberg 1954, and others that have shape and reshape the dynamics of political participation theory.

3. METHODOLOGY

Location of the Study

This study was conducted in Ondo State. The state was created from the defunct western region on the 3rd, February, 1976, with its administration capital in Akure. The state is located in the western zone of the country. It is bounded by Ekiti, Edo, Ogun, Osun States and Kogi state. The present Ondo State has 18 Local Government Areas with a total population about 4,671,695 of Yoruba speaking people who are mostly Muslims, Christians and traditional worshipers/faithfuls. It is endowed with huge natural resources and adequate man power. It has primary, secondary schools and higher institutions of learning.

Study Area

This study conducted randomly selected urban and rural towns and communities in Ondo State of Nine (9) local governments out of eighteen (18) local governments. This was done to ensure that the locations cut across the three (3) senatorial districts in the State (Central, North and South).

Table 2: design outlay for selecting study area/location

S/N	Sensational district	Local govt. to be selected	Number of communities to be selected	Total no to be selected	Total Aggregate
1	Ondo North	Akoko North – East	Okeagbe, Ikaram, Ese, Irun, Eriti.	5	
		Akoko South – West	Akungba, Oba, Oka, Supare, Ayegunle.	5	15
		Owo	Ipele, Ijebu, Uso, Emure-Ile, Idasen	5	
2	Ondo Central	Ondo West	Agbado, Fagbo, Ondo Town, Laje, Bagbe.	5	
		Akure South	Igbatoro, Aponmu, Ilara-mokin, Oke Aro	5	15
		Ifedore	Igbara-oke, Ipogun, Owema, Ilara-mokin Ijare	5	
3	Ondo South	Okitipupa	Ode Aye, Ilu Titun, Iju Odo, Okitipupa, Igbotako	5	

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		Oke-Igbo/Ile –Oluji	Ile-Oluji, Oke-Igbo, Ifetedo, Bankemo, Olorun tele	5	15
		Ese-odo	Asere, Akina zion, Epemubou, Bibokepiri, Baikiri	5	
Total	**3**	**9**		**45**	**45**

Reason for the Study Area Locations
A total of Nine (9) Local Governments out of Eighteen (18) local governments were selected for the study. This ensured that the state was adequately represented. The nine local governments and forty-five communities selected were relatively appropriate for the chosen study.

Sample Frame/Participants
The participants for the study were members of the communities which include, youths students, leaders of communities, academics and professionals.

Interview
In the investigation, execution and realization of the aims and objectives of the study, both primaries were secondary methods used for data collection. The technique of data collection from primary sources included questionnaires, oral interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) while the secondary data will be sourced from relevant textbooks, journals, internet materials. Analysis of data through frequency counts, percentage and descriptive statistics.

Methods of Data Collection
Structured questionnaire, personal interviews and focus group discussion will be used to elicit information from the respondents, while secondary data will be collected from publications on youths' participation and representation in politics.

Data Analysis Technique
The researchers made use of simple percentage and frequency count to analyze data gathered during the field work.

Expected Findings/Outputs
The research findings have been the following;

- Contributed to knowledge about youth's participation and representation in politics of Ondo State.
- Pin-point the level of youth participation and representation in politics of Ondo State
- Revealed factors responsible for youth exclusion from participatory politics.
- Identified, showcase the plights and the chällenges of other indicators / variables that youths continue to face in nascent and consolidated democracy.

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Expected Contributions

The study stimulated further knowledge and create further awareness as regard the imperative for more active youth's participation and representation in politics in Nigeria considering that youths constitute significant stake in the Nigerian political system.

Method of Data Collection

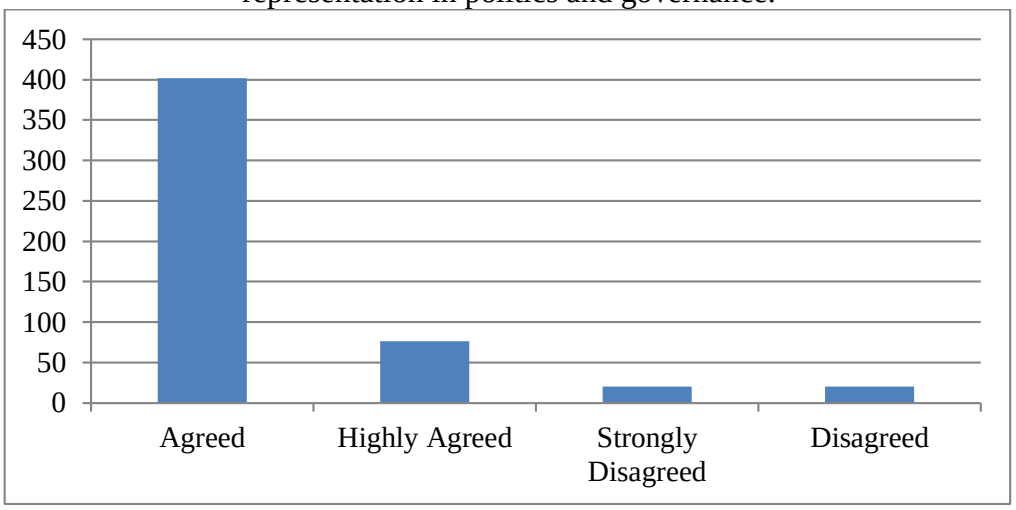
Structured questionnaire were prepared and 15 personal interviews (focus group discussion) were conducted to elicit information from respondents, while secondary data were collected from textbooks, journals, internet materials on youths in politics of Ondo state.

Table 3: Democratic process in Ondo state has enhanced youth's participation and representation in politics and governance:

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Highly Agreed	76	14.7
Agreed	402	77.0
Strongly Disagreed	20	3.9
Disagreed	20	3.9

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Fig 1: Democratic process in Ondo state has enhanced youths' participation and representation in politics and governance.



The result from Table 3 and Fig. 1 showed that 402 (77.6%) of the respondents agreed and 76 (14.7%) highly agreed, while 20(3.9%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 20 (3.9%) disagreed that democratic process in Ondo state has enhanced youths' participation and representation. The above outcome analyses showed that majorly (77.6%) of the respondents agreed that Democratic practice in Ondo state has been an enabling factor for effective youths' participation and representation in the politics and governance of Ondo state.

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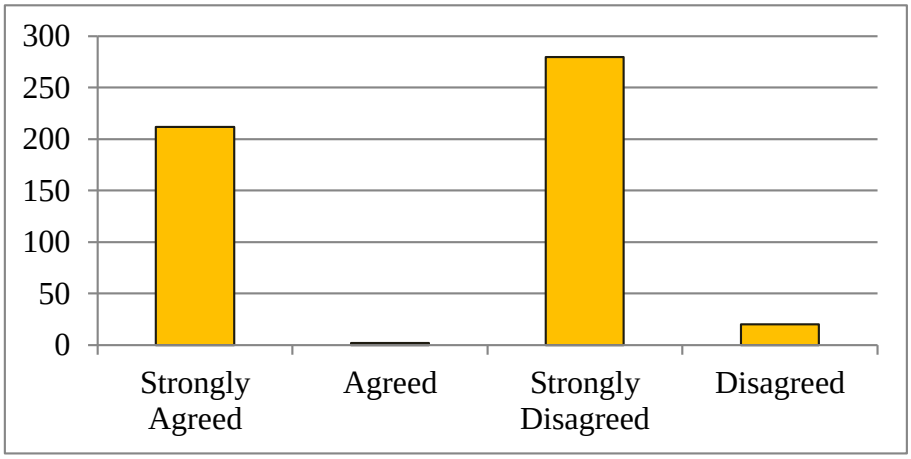
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Table 4: Are you confident that financial/economic base in Nigeria is fair enough to youths vis-à-vis elderly persons?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Highly Confident	44	8.8
Confident	365	71.2
Not Confident	38	7.4
Undecided	66	12.9

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Fig 2: Are you confident that financial/economic base in Nigeria is fair enough to youths vis-à-vis elderly persons in the politics of Ondo state?



The outcome from Table 4 and Fig. 2 discovered that 365 (71.2%) of the respondents confident and 44 (8.8%) highly confident while 38 (7.4%) of the respondents not confident and 66 (12.9%) undecided that the electoral law was fair enough. The result therefore revealed that 71.2% of the respondents indicated confidence in the favour of financial/economic base being okay enough to youths' participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state.

Table 5: Do you agree that barrier/exclusion continue to be impediment to youths' political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state?

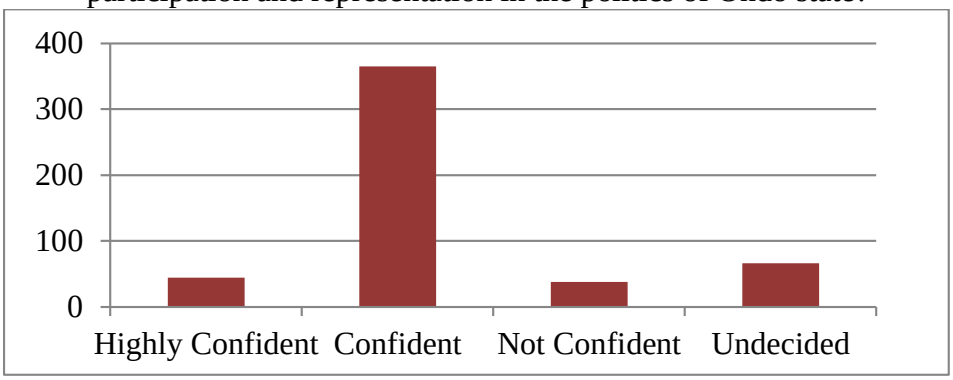
Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agreed	212	41.2
Agreed	02	0.4
Disagreed	280	54.5
Strongly Disagreed	20	3.9

Source: Field Survey, 2024

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Fig 3: Do you agree that barrier/exclusion continue to be impediment to youths' political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state?



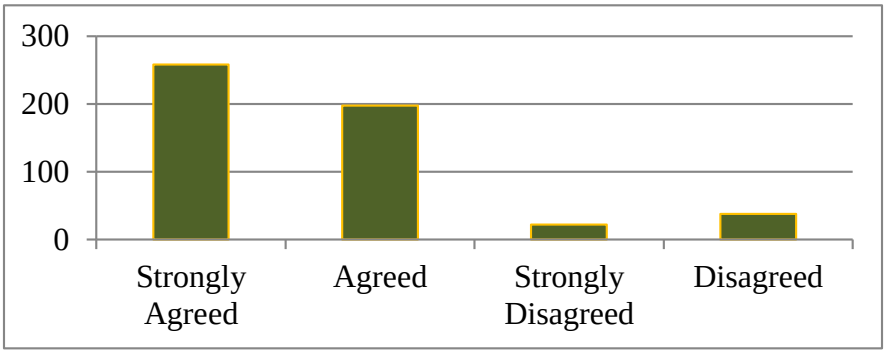
The outcome from Table 5 and Fig. 3 revealed that 2(0.4%) agreed by the respondent and 280(54.4%) disagreed while 212 (41.2%) strongly agreed by the respondent and 20 (3.9%) strongly disagreed. The result outcome noted that majority of the respondent did not agreed that any barrier or exclusion exerted as impediments to youths' participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state.

Table 6: Do you agree that non-access to political activities in Ondo state has hinder greater youths' participation and representation in the top leadership positions?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agreed	258	50.0
Agreed	198	38.4
Disagreed	38	7.4
Strongly Disagreed	22	4.3

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Fig 4: Do you agree that non-access to political activities in Ondo state has hinder greater youths' participation and representation in the top leadership positions?



The result revealed from Table 6 and Fig. 4 observed that 198 (38.4%) agreed to the assertion and 258 (50.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed, while 38 (7.4%) disagreed and 22 (4.3%) strongly disagreed from the respondents. The outcome results noted that majority of

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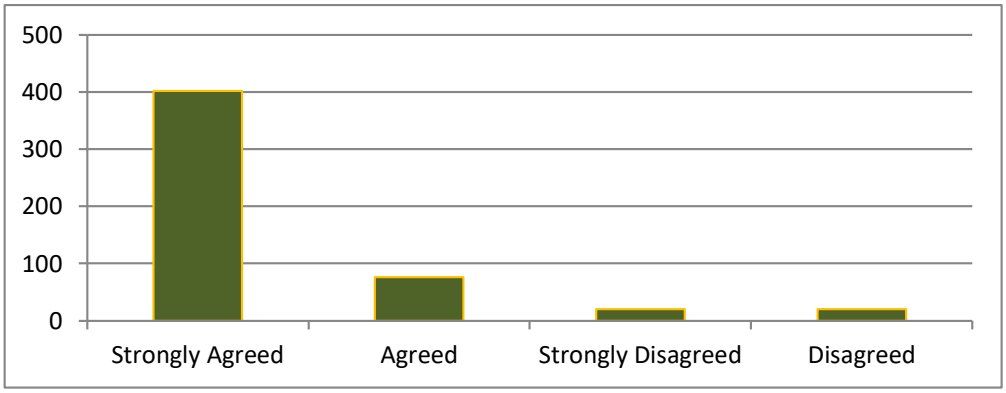
the respondents – 258 (50.0%) strongly agreed that there are limitations of youths to the top key positions in leadership.

Table 7: Do you agree that electoral success of any incumbent party in government in Ondo state will ensure their political patronage, participation and representation?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agreed	402	77.6
Agreed	76	14.7
Disagreed	20	3.9
Strongly Disagreed	20	3.9

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Fig. 5: Do you agree that electoral success of any incumbent party in government in Ondo state will ensure their political patronage, participation and representation?



The outcome results noted that 402 (77.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 76 (14.7%) agreed to the assertion while 20 (3.9%) disagreed and 20 (3.9%) of the respondent strongly disagreed. The result above indicated that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that financial gains and patronage will come for youths' political participation and representation by the incumbent party in governance.

Data Analysis/Technique
Simple percentage and frequency count were used to analyzed the data gathered from the field work.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kindly find there in the analyses of the tables from 4 to 7. Table 4 analysed the indicator/variables under investigators with result of the respondents where the financial/economic base in Nigeria is fair enough to youth vis-à-vis elderly person which the majority of 365 (71.2%) confident on the assertion as a posture step. Table 6 was analysed on the variables that the non-access to political activities in Ondo state has hider greater youth's

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participation and representation in the top leadership position, where there respondent strongly agreed to the issue with 258 (50.0%) acceptable level. Table 7 analysed the investigation that electoral success of any incumbent party in government in Ondo state will ensure their political patronage participation and representation is normal with 402 (77.6%) strongly agreed with proposition.

Summary of Findings

The research found out the followings:

- Identified the plights or challenges of other indicators/variables that youths continue to face in the consolidation of Ondo state politics;
- Identified factors responsible for people with youths' exclusion from political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state;
- Accertained the level of degree of youths' involvement in the political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state and
- Contributed to knowledge about youths in political participation and representation of Ondo state politics since 2003 - 2018.

Expected Contributions

The study created further awareness on the imperative for more active youths in the political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo state considering that they represent a very distinctive demographic size and proportion within the system as well as protecting within their group interests will help in the sustainability of the politics of the nation at large.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is inferable from the emperical research study that youths gave been under-represented, marginalised and excluded in the politics of Ondo state between 2003 and 2018 as there was very few youths included in any elective or appointive positions. Therefore, the study recommends that political parties should agree to involve and accomodate youths aspirants to engage fully in the political process and in the governance of Ondo state. Enabling environment through the electoral law that recognises the youths should be allowed to prevail. In recognition of the youths' right in Nigeria, and across the world, the youths should be encouraged to participate actively in democracy and governance through human capital development and the enhanced system for representation and participation for the needed overall growth of politics in Ondo state and Nigeria as a whole.

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