

A Reflection of Zambia's Independence since 1964.

Youth integration in politics and governance issues.

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Following Zambia's declaration of independence in 1964, the country began a voyage towards self-rule, autonomy, and the hope of a more prosperous tomorrow. This essay delves into Zambia's journey to independence spanning the last Fifty-Nine years, with special emphasis on how the youth have significantly influenced the nation's political and governance landscape. The changing dynamics of involving young people in political and governance matters provide a distinct perspective for grasping the difficulties, advancements, and promises of a nation that has always cherished the hopes and dreams of its youth.

It's essential to recognize that Zambia transitioned to a multi-party system in 1991, representing a notable departure from its previous less inclusive one-party state. This shift occurred after nearly thirty years under the leadership of President Kenneth Kaunda, who was in power since Zambia's inception in 1964¹. The emergence of the "born-free" generation, who did not experience the constraints of the earlier political landscape, is a noteworthy development. Since 1991, the widespread adoption of the Internet and the rise of social media, especially in the last two decades, have provided approximately 80% of Zambians with access to digital communication tools, resulting in heightened political engagement. This transition towards digital citizenship and online political participation carried significant implications for democratic involvement, particularly among the nation's youth.

In a broader African context, the role of youth in politics and governance is a significant theme, as exemplified by the Ethics Club's activism in Cameroon². This club's efforts highlight the connection between youth integration, democratic governance, and the forces of globalization. Much like Zambia's journey since 1964, this constructivist approach suggests that promoting

¹ Phiri S. Youth Participation in Politics. In 2019. p. 54–78. Available from: <http://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve.aspx?doi=10.4018/978-1-5225-9388-1.ch004>

² Touo H. African Youth and Globalization: The Experience of the Ethics Club in the Process of Socio-political Integration of the Youth in Cameroon. Vol 17 No 1-2 [Internet]. 2013;17(2). Available from: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/aa/article/view/90141>

transparency, ethics, and youth participation can have far-reaching implications, transcending borders and offering the promise of overcoming corruption and strengthening democratic governance. Moreover, the influence of Information and Communication Technologies, as observed in Cameroonian society, underscores the evolving dynamics in youth engagement. Empowering young people in decision-making processes can potentially shape the trajectory of not only Zambia but also other African nations, as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of independence in a global age.

In modern governance, acknowledging the transformative influence of the internet and technology is crucial not just for Zambia but on a global scale. Recent studies underline the significance of youth involvement in addressing internet-related challenges³. The European HUWY project (Hub Websites for Youth Participation), which engaged young people in discussions about Internet governance, offers a compelling example of this involvement. It employed a novel distributed discussion model, emphasizing the need for seamless integration of online and offline activities and highlighting the importance of involving policy-makers to motivate youth participation. This experience resonates with Zambia's independence journey, emphasizing the evolving role of social media and digital platforms in shaping youth participation and the future of nations.

Globalization and European integration have reshaped national identities and education across Europe, with traditional nation-states losing their influence over civic participation and identity formation. Daniel Faas's pioneering research, based on data from German and British schools, explored how schools mediate government policies, shaping young people's identities and integration experiences⁴. His work was the first to examine identity formation differences within and between countries, focusing on ethnic majority and Turkish minority youth. It emphasizes the role of school policies in this process and links these findings to broader European and American debates on immigrant integration. This perspective can provide valuable insights into youth integration in Zambian politics and governance, highlighting the impact of globalization and evolving identities.

³ Kimpeler, Simone; Lindner, Ralf; Taylor-Smith, Ella; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt P. Supporting young people's political participation through distributed discussion - lessons obtained from an EU pilot.

⁴ Faas D. Negotiating Political Identities: Multiethnic Schools and Youth in Europe. Available from: <https://www.wzb.eu/system/files/docs/mad/mit/13invitationfaas.pdf>

Zambia being a relatively young nation, grapples with economic and political challenges, compounded by a significant youth population. These difficulties are amplified by the disparity between the globalized world that Zambian youth experience and the country's current realities, marked by economic issues like frequent power outages and declining copper prices. Zambia's fragile democracy faces ethnic politics expansion following two rapid presidential elections, raising concerns about potential political and ethnic violence. An article investigated how ethnic identities influence the democratic landscape among Zambian youth using survey data from 419 public university students⁵. The research revealed that while Zambian youth consider ethnicity important to their identities, they believe it shouldn't play a role in politics. Despite this view, the youth overwhelmingly perceive politicians as practicing political tribalism. This dissatisfaction with ethnic politics has led to decreased voter turnout. The article sheds light on contemporary challenges in Zambia's society and politics. It offers insights into the evolution of the influence of ethnicity on politics and youth engagement since the country's independence. These challenges and disillusionment are pertinent for understanding the dynamics of political and ethnic identity in post-independence Zambia and their effects on governance and civic participation.

The Zambian Government has prioritized youth development and their participation in national development⁶. They revised the 2006 National Youth Policy to better align with the needs of the youth and create a favorable environment for their involvement. This policy reflects Zambia's youthful population and seeks to harness its potential for national development. It aims to provide equal opportunities for youth to grow, develop, and contribute as responsible citizens. The policy focuses on areas like employment, education, health, and cultural development, with an emphasis on inclusion, active participation, and intergovernmental coordination to ensure the success and professionalization of youth work.

With Zambia's population at approximately 18.9 million, a substantial part of it consists of young people. In the lead-up to the 2021 general elections, political parties and leaders needed to prioritize the youth's concerns. The Youth Manifesto served as the collective voice of Zambia's youth, articulating their immediate needs and priorities for political leaders to address⁷. It also

⁵ Roberts D, Silwamba S. Ethnicity, politics and Zambian youth. *Contemp Soc Sci* [Internet]. 2017 Oct 2;12(3–4):189–201. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21582041.2017.1385831>

⁶ National Youth Policy

⁷ Zambian Youth manifesto

functioned as a means to hold leaders accountable for their commitments to young people, going beyond the elections. The manifesto was crafted through an inclusive and consultative process, involving a diverse array of youth groups and organizations, including those representing individuals with disabilities. It aimed to provide a framework for addressing the needs of Zambia's youth, recognizing the country's youthful demographic, and encouraging collaboration among all stakeholders.

Zambia's journey to independence since 1964 has highlighted the evolving role of youth in shaping the political and governance landscape. The transition to a multi-party system in 1991, influenced by the "born-free" generation and the digital age, marked a new era. The government's recognition of youth integration in governance, and the potential for collaboration among stakeholders. The youth's role in politics and governance remains dynamic and influential in shaping Zambia's future and democratic engagement.