

## **FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN BLANTYRE, MALAWI**

<sup>1\*</sup> **Witness Isaak Mbulaje**  
[witwhyght@yahoo.com](mailto:witwhyght@yahoo.com)

<sup>2\*\*</sup> **Samuel Obino Mokaya**  
[smokaya@yahoo.com](mailto:smokaya@yahoo.com)

<sup>3\*\*\*</sup> **Samwel Marwa Werema**  
[smwerema@yahoo.com](mailto:smwerema@yahoo.com)

<sup>1,2,3</sup> *Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology  
School of Entrepreneurship, Procurement and Management.*

---

**Abstract:** *The contemporary world has the largest population of the youths in history. However, they are not entirely active in political governance during and after elections. The situation is truer in Africa and Malawi in particular. Many youths are indifferent to participation in political governance. Malawi has youth policies; however, much of it remains in books. The study sought to establish how culture, trust in governance structures and civic education affect participation of the youth in political governance in Blantyre, Malawi. The study employed a case study research design on a sample of 400 drawn from a target population of 9,974 youths. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions. The collected data was analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics to determine the relationship between variables. The study found that 70% of the youths are not actively involved in politics. Furthermore, culture and trust in governance structures do not affect youth participation in political governance significantly. However, civic education affects youth participation in political governance in Blantyre significantly. The study recommends enhancement of civic education. An introduction of civic education in primary and secondary schools and sensitization on duties and rights of citizens to the youths.*

**Keywords:** *Youths, political participation, governance, civic education, culture*

---

### **1. Introduction**

There is a global understanding among social scientists that the youth constitute a significant percentage of the global population (Resnick, 2013; Robertson, 2009; Ben-Attar, 2010; Henn, 2005; UNDP, 2014; OECD Development Centre, 2018). Universally, at the beginning of 2012, 50.5% of the population was below 30 years (Gordon, 2012). The United Nations Youth Strategy 2030, states that the modern world is a home to the largest generation of young people in history. It is a home of approximately 1.8 billion young people. Besides, many of them live in the third world countries (UN, 2018). UNDP, which operates in 177 countries worldwide, acknowledges that more than 60% of the people in countries where it functions are youths aged between 15 and 24 years (UNDP, 2014).

The African Youth Decade (2009-2018) final report of the 7<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the assembly, held in Banjul-Gambia on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2006, affirmed the UNDP report that “African Population is estimated to be more than a billion people of whom over 60% are young men and women under the age of 35” (UNDP, 2013). The Youth Well-Being Report for Malawi 2018, states that the population is very young such that about 46% of the people are under the age of 15 and up to 73% has not reached the age of 30 (OECD Development Centre, 2018).

In Malawi, a youth is anyone aged 10 to 35 regardless of sex, race, education, culture, religion, economic, marital and physical status (MoYS, 2013; OECD Development Center, 2018). The study adopted the understanding of the term youth as persons aged between 18 and 35 regardless of their sex, race, education, culture and religion, economic, marital and physical status. This was adopted because the study espoused voting as a form of participation in political governance and a person is eligible to vote at the age of 18. Besides, in this study, the term youth is used interchangeably with ‘young people.’

Although the youth are majority especially in developing countries, various studies have shown that their participation in political governance is lower than older generations. Kimberlee (2010) notices that the number of voters in the 2001 UK general election declined. According to his findings, this was a clear indication that during the election, fewer young voters participated (Kimberlee, 2010). Robertson (2009) found out that many young people in post-communist democracies choose to opt-out of traditional forms of political participation because just like elsewhere, they feel estranged from formal political agents. In Australia, voting is compulsory; nevertheless, youth disengagement in political governance is so apparent and is a matter of great concern (Saha, *et al.*, 2007).

The declining of youth participation in political governance has negative repercussions, especially in Africa. In Kenya, it was revealed that the youth who are not actively involved in politics to address governance problems are the ones who were mostly involved in the post-election violence of December 2007 (Abdille, 2008). In Nigeria, political elites assign to the youth roles that lead to violence, which makes it difficult for Nigeria to experience democratic sustenance unless the politicians inculcate in young people democratic culture by allowing them to take part in decision-making (Inokoba *et al.*, 2011). According to Musarurwa (2018), in Zimbabwe, political governance system gives no room to young people. Lack of proper civic education for the youth due to financial constraints is a major obstacle. Consequently, the youth shun away from politics to earn a living in neighboring countries.

In Malawi, there is a growing sense of distrust and uncertainty among the youth in the way they perceive politics; they are no longer interested in political governance issues (Kalepa, 2016). In addition, due to high levels of poverty, many Malawian youths are much concerned with socio-economic issues for their survival than political matters (Mchakulu, 2007). Moreover, when they appear in the political arena, most of them are there, thanks to politicians who hire them for their political mileage.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In line with International Communities and Agreements that promote inclusion of the youth in decision making processes to which Malawi is a signatory like United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), African Union Agenda 2063 and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Malawi produced a development plan called Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III 2017-2022). The strategy acknowledges that Malawian population is young with about 46% of the population under the age of 15 and 73% below the age of 30 (MGDS III, 2017; OECD Development Centre, 2018). This compels inclusion of the youths in decision-making processes during and after elections in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy because they are the majority (UNDP, 2017).

According to the OECD Development Centre (2018), in Malawi, the majority of the youths live in urban areas while in search of job opportunities and pursuing studies. However, studies show that participation of the youth in political governance is low in the metropolitan than in rural areas of Malawi (Gallup, 2016; UNDP, 2017; OECD Development Centre, 2018). Moreover, only 1.9% of parliamentarians and ministers are below the age of 30 (UNDP, 2017). Many young people live in urban areas; yet their participation in political governance

is lower than those that are living in rural areas. In other words, many young people who are studying and searching for jobs in urban areas of Malawi do not take part in political governance.

Youth participation in political governance can be the driving force for prosperity that Malawi needs. Prospects of development in Malawi counts on the involvement of the youth in political governance during and after elections. On the other hand, their disengagement is a recipe for disaster because they are easy target for those who use violence to gain political mileage.

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study was to establish factors affecting youth participation in political governance in Ndirande Township in Blantyre, Malawi. Specifically, it sought how culture, trust in governance institutions and civic education affect youth participation in political governance in Blantyre, Malawi.

### **4. Methodology**

The study employed Case Study design. The sample size was 400 drawn from a target population of 9,974 comprising of political youth cadres and youth group members. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions. Data was analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics including mean, percentages and correlation.

### **5. Results and Analysis**

#### **5.1 The Impact of Culture on Youth Participation in Political Governance**

The study found out that culture had no significant impact on youth participation in political governance whereby the overall mean score was 1.68. The highest mean score was 1.74 on political leadership as a role of young people in the society followed by young people's role as decision makers 1.71. The lowest score was 1.58 on the involvement of young people in political governance.

The results indicated that 78% of the respondents thought that cultural beliefs affect youth participation in political governance whereby 42% rated it very high and 36 % rated it high. However, 8% of the respondents rated it very low, 6% rated it low and another 8% did not think cultural beliefs affect youth participation in political governance in any way.

Culture was correlated with youth participation in political governance and the findings indicated that youth participation in political governance had no significant correlation with any of the attributes of culture. For instance, the characteristic of young people's involvement in politics had a negative weak correlation of (-0.030), young people as political leaders in the society had a weak positive correlation of (0.011); young people as decision-makers in the society had a weak positive correlation of (0.026). Likewise, the overall correlation between culture and youth participation in political governance was (0.050) which is a weak positive correlation.

Thus, notwithstanding that, cultural beliefs exert an impact on participation of the youth in political governance in Blantyre; it is not one of the main contributing factors. This is so because despite cultural beliefs, constitutional rights give freedom to the youth to participate in political governance through voting, campaigning and other methods. The actual negative impact of cultural beliefs on political participation is clear after elections where young people are not opted into leadership positions based on cultural biases. Hence, the results show that there is no significant correlation between culture and youth participation in political governance in Blantyre.

## **5.2 Impact of Trust in Governance Structures on Youth Participation in Political Governance**

The study revealed that trust in governance structures has no significant impact on youth participation in political governance whereby the overall mean score was 2.16. The highest mean score was 2.68 on young people's trust in political governance structures followed by young people's trust in political governance officials with a mean score of 2.10. The lowest score was 1.88 on political parties' fulfillment of promises to young people. However, the findings indicated that 85% of the respondents rated the level of trust in governance structures to be low whereby 27% rated it very low and 58% rated it low. Further, 6% of the respondents rated it high and 3% rated it very high. Besides, another 6% thought that there was no trust at all in governance structures among the youth in Blantyre.

Trust in governance structures was correlated with youth participation in political governance and the findings showed a positive but not significant correlation. Youth participation in political governance had only one positive significant correlation with the aspect of members of parliament fulfilling their promises to young people (0.118\*). On one hand, participation in political governance had positive but not significant correlation with the aspect of young people having trust in governance structures (0.031) and young people having trust in political governance officials (0.032). On the other hand, participation in political governance had a negative not significant correlation with the aspect of political parties fulfilling their promises to young people (0.007). The overall correlation between trust in governance structures and participation in political governance was established at a Pearson coefficient of 0.043, which means it was positive but not significant. Thus, despite that political trust is a pro-democratic value, its absence is not plainly damaging to democracy (Van Der Meer, 2017). Nevertheless, it creates misgivings that affect people's political engagement. In other words, it leads to voter apathy. Many young people in Blantyre do not see a good reason for taking part in political governance because they have lost trust in politicians and they feel used. Hence, according to the findings, trust in governance structures does not affect youth participation in political governance in Blantyre significantly.

## **5.3 Impact of Civic Education on Youth Participation in Political Governance in Blantyre**

The study found out that civic education affects youth participation in political governance in Blantyre, whereby an overall mean score was 2.73. The highest score was 3.08 on the characteristic of taking part in political governance as a duty of the youths seconded by the duty of the government to teach young people about political governance 2.83. The lowest score was 2.49 on knowledge of how political governance systems operate.

Likewise, the findings indicate that 78% of the respondents agreed that the level of political knowledge among the youth is low whereby 19% of the respondents rated it very low and 59% rated it low. However, 8% of the respondents rated it high while 6% believed it was very high. Moreover, 8% held that there was no political knowledge at all among the youth in Blantyre (Figure 1).

Consequently, 70% of the respondents agreed that lack of political knowledge affects youth participation in political governance in Blantyre whereby 33% of the respondents held political knowledge as having a very high impact on youth participation in political governance while 37% observed that it had high impact. On the other hand, 10% of the respondents believed political knowledge had very low impact on youth participation in political governance and 15% rated it

low. Yet, 5% of the respondents thought that political knowledge had no impact at all on youth participation in political governance.

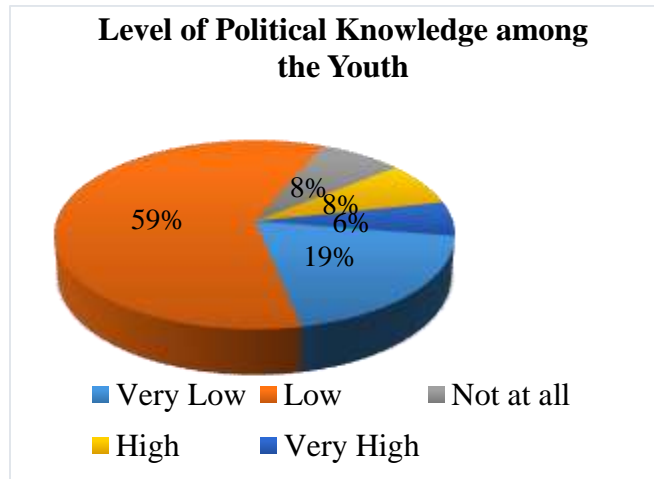


Figure 1. Level of Political Knowledge among the youth

Civic education was correlated with youth participation in political governance and the findings indicated that it had positive and significant correlation with all the attributes of youth participation in political governance. For instance, knowledge about one’s duty to take part in political governance (0.158\*\*), the duty of the government to teach the youths about political governance (0.144\*\*), knowledge about how political governance works (0.149\*\*) and understanding democracy, duties and rights (0.158\*\*). Similarly, the overall correlation between attributes of civic education and youth participation in political governance was (0.188\*\*) implying that civic education had positive and significant impact on youth participation in political governance in Blantyre.

#### 5.4 Level of Youth Participation in Political Governance in Blantyre, Malawi

The results indicate that many young people do not take part in political governance in Blantyre during and after elections whereby the overall mean score of 2.52 was established. The highest mean score was 3.10 on young people’s participation in political governance during elections through voting followed by the mean score 2.58 on youth participation in political governance through involvement in political debates on the radio, internet or in newspapers. The lowest mean score was 2.26 on youth participation in political governance through belonging to youth groups that discuss political matters with an intention of finding solutions to community problems.

Likewise, the results indicated that 70% of the youth are not much involved in political governance in Blantyre whereby 19% rated it very low while 51% believed it was low. On one hand, 16% of the respondents saw the participation of the youth in political governance in Blantyre to be high and 8% rated it very high. On the other hand, 6% of the respondents thought that the youths are not involved at all in political governance in Blantyre (Figure 2, next page).

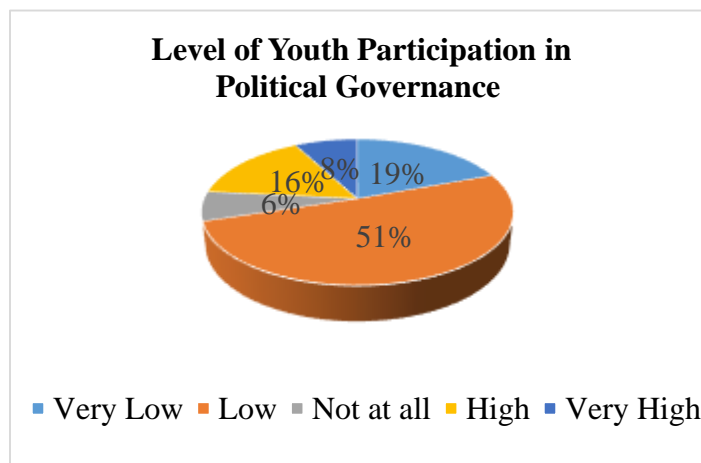


Figure 2. Level of youth Participation in Political Governance

### 6. Conclusions

According to the findings, participation of the youth in political governance in Blantyre leaves a lot to be desired. Despite that up to 73% of population is below the age of 30 (OECD Development Centre, 2018), majority of the youths do not take part in political governance. This study found out that many young people are not taking part in political governance due to cultural factors, lack of trust in political governance structures and lack of proper civic education.

Culturally, political governance is a domain for old people and it is their role in the society to be leaders and make decisions. However, according to the findings, this understanding does not have a significant impact on the participation of the youth in political governance in Blantyre. According to the findings, the respondents disagreed to the postulation that culture has a significant impact on youth participation in political governance. The results show that two aspects of culture significantly correlated with voting during elections and campaigning for one’s political party candidate. This is the case because regardless of cultural beliefs, the Malawian constitution gives a right to the youths aged 18 and above to take part in voting and campaign.

Thus, their involvement in political governance is manifested only during campaigning and voting. This poses a challenge because after elections, the youths have low representation in decision-making forums like parliament and different boards due to cultural biases that do not accommodate young people in leadership positions.

Further, the results revealed that the correlation between culture and youth participation in political governance is a weak positive one, which means that although culturally young people are not supposed to be leaders in the society, with good education, empowerment and youth mainstreaming, they can hold leadership positions in decision-making forums. Culture is not a strong barrier to youth participation in political governance as such. That is why we have countable young people in some decision-making boards. However, because they are few, old people underrate and suppress their views.

The results revealed that young people in Blantyre do not have trust in political governance structures and political leaders. This is affecting their participation in political governance. From the results, the attributes of trust in political governance structures, such as, trust in political governance structures, trust in governance officials and fulfillment of promises by members of parliament had a positive but no significant correlation with voting, participation in protests and contacting politicians to report community problems. This indicates

that if the youth trusted in political governance structures and members of parliament, then many young people would take part during elections through voting, they would contact politicians to report community problems and they would participate in protests to influence decision makers. Trust in governance structures and youth participation in political governance showed a weak positive correlation, indicating that the relationship between the two variables is not strong. Lack of trust in governance structures does not have a detrimental effect as such; however, when it is strong it is a measure of people's satisfaction with those in leadership and leads to voter apathy.

The results showed that attributes of civic education had a positive and significant correlation with youth participation in political governance. For example, taking part during elections through voting, campaigning for one's political party candidate, belonging to youth organizations that discuss political issues, contacting politicians to report community problems, taking part in protests to influence decision-makers and participating in political debates on the radio, internet or in newspapers. This indicates that civic education is one of the key determining factors of youth participation in political governance in Blantyre. Civic education moves in tandem with youth participation in political governance. This implies that if the level of political knowledge increases, the level of youth participation in political governance increases as well in Blantyre.

From the findings, the study concluded that the three independent variables: culture, civic education and trust in political governance structures had many significant correlations and those that were not significant were positively correlations. The results revealed that civic education has much impact on youth participation in political governance and it had more significant correlations than other two variables. This implies that promoting civic education among the youth in Blantyre can significantly improve the levels of youth participation in political governance.

## **7. Recommendations**

The population of young people is the highest compared to any other generation in world history. Besides, a large number of young people is living in developing countries like Malawi. In Malawi, up to 73% of the population is under the age of 30. Disengagement in political governance of this huge cohort goes contrary to the main tenet of democracy itself, participation. Malawi as a young democratic country can grow democratically and economically if its citizens who are eligible to take part in political governance have a good representation in decision-making processes during and after elections. The common trend in Malawi is that few young people take part in political governance during elections and they are not actively involved afterwards. Due to this, their ambitions and aspirations are not well represented in decision-making forums.

Thus, the study recommends youth mainstreaming in Malawian political governance. There should be laws that ascribe a percentage of representatives to be young people in a same way that there is a percentage of positions reserved for women in our constitution. This recommendation is hinged on the tenet that lack of participation of the youth in political governance renders political governance system illegitimate because it is not a representation of the majority.

Furthermore, Malawi is losing a lot of talent that lies untapped in the young generation whose numbers can be a springboard for its development. It is from such a realization that the Malawian government in its roadmap to development, Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III), stipulates the inclusion of the youth in decision-making processes. However, this is not the first time that in the development plans of the nation, the idea of including the youth has come up. The challenge has been implementation of those plans. These plans are difficult to implement because among those that are supposed to discuss and implement them, young people are not represented.

According to the population distribution of Malawi, many young people live in urban areas like Ndirande Township. However, they are not actively involved in political governance during and after elections, as Gallup (2016) revealed it and confirmed by this study. The main cause of urbanization in Malawi is search for employment and education. Many young people who live in shantytowns of Malawi are not financially stable. The study has revealed that majority of them are either students or job-seekers. When people are not financially stable it is difficult for them to take part in political governance since they concentrate on finding means of earning a living.

Therefore, in accordance with the findings of this study, it is recommended that the government of Malawi find ways of empowering young people to be economically self-reliant so that they can take part in the development of the country. Failure to empower the youths economically can lead to high levels of crime in the country and migration to other countries. Many young Malawians are working outside the country, which is depriving the country of intellectual and labor resources.

The study has revealed that the main hiccup to youth participation in Blantyre is lack of proper civic education among the youth. Therefore, the study recommends that the ministry of civic education, culture and community development in Malawi should focus at civic educating young people about the importance of their participation in political governance, about human rights and their duties as citizens. Further, the education system in Malawi should consider introducing civic education in its primary and secondary school syllabuses as a way of empowering the youth with democratic governance knowledge. Malawi needs citizens that know their duties and rights and such citizens can be groomed through the education system and organizations responsible for civic education.

Civil society organizations that deal with civic education of the people like, National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), should take deliberate effort to educate the youth not only about elections but also more especially about what it means to be a good citizen and how they can contribute to the development of the country. They can implement this by introducing youth organizations in townships that can help young people learn and discuss political governance issues.

The study also found out that many young people are discouraged to take part in political governance due to lack of trust in political governance structures and officials. This calls for integrity among political leaders so that they can inspire young people to take part in political governance. Keeping promises to young people and giving an example of statesmanship is instrumental in promotion of youth participation in political governance.

The study revealed that culture influences youth participation in political governance albeit in a weak way. However, it is the duty of the ministry of civic education, culture and development as well to empower young people to take part in political governance by emphasizing the importance of their involvement in political governance. This can be implemented by organizing meetings, radio and television programs that elaborate on the significance of youth participation in political governance and challenge some cultural beliefs that hinder them.

On the side of the youth themselves, the study recommends them to develop an interest in political issues. There is a tendency among young people of making noise on the social media and condemning politicians yet when time for voting comes, they are not willing to take part. It remains important for the youth to take responsibility for shaping their own futures no matter what reasons for their disaffection. It is high time they realize that it is only through their involvement in political governance that their aspirations and dreams can be materialized.



Furthermore, young people should avoid defeatism. Many young people feel defeated and hopeless on political matters. This is because culturally they feel that they do not qualify to be political leaders due to their age and financial muscles and they have little political knowledge. They need to develop confidence in themselves that they are no longer future leaders but leaders of today. Besides, they ought to follow current affairs and learn from young people from other countries on what strides they are undertaking to influence decision makers and becoming decision makers.

Furthermore, young people need to be ready to learn from old people. To reverse the situation young people should be ready to learn from old people so that they can gain the required experience and knowledge. Old people can be a great source of knowledge for young aspiring politicians. They can impart their knowledge and wisdom to the young generation. To achieve this, veteran politicians should play a mentorship role to young ones who are interested in political leadership. This can be achieved by having carrier guide from politician veterans in schools, colleges and youth groups and having programs on radio and television where political leadership mentoring can be done.

### References

- *Abdille, H. (2008). Understanding political violence among youth: Evidence from Kenya on the links between youth, economic independence, social integration, and stability. Edinburg, Scotland: Merci Corps.*
- *Ben-Attah, D. (2010, July 01). Youth Participation in development: strategies and best practice. Retrieved from weitz-center organization: <http://www.weitz-center.org>*
- *Ezin, J. (2011, June 13). African Youth Decade 2009-2018 Action Plan: Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from African Union .org: <http://www.african-union.org>*
- *Gordon, L. (2012, December 11). Special Report: the world's youngest populations. Retrieved from Euromonitor: <http://blog.euromonitor.com/special-report-the-worlds-s-youngest-populations/>*
- *Inokoba, P. (2011). Youths, Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: the Bayelsa State Experience. Wilberforce Island: Niger Delta University Press.*
- *Kalepa, J. (2016). Youth Participation in Elections in Africa: an eight-country study. Johannesburg: Minds Publications.*
- *Kimberlee, H. (2002). Why don't British Young People Vote at General Elections? Journal of Youth Studies, 5(1), 85-98.*
- *Malawi, R. o. (2013). National Youth Policy of Malawi. Lilongwe: Capitol Hill.*
- *Mchakulu, J. (2007). Youth Participation in Radio Listening Clubs in Malawi. Journal of Southern African Studies, 12-19.*
- *Musarurwa, J. (2018). Closed Spaces or (in) competent citizens? A study of youth preparedness for participation in elections in Zimbabwe. Durban: Durban University of Technology.*
- *OECD. (2018). Government at a Glance: Trust in government, policy effectiveness and governance agenda. Paris: OECD.*

- *Resnick, D and Casale, D. (2011). The Political Participation of Africa's Youth: Turnout, Partisanship and Protest. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.*
- *Resnick, D. and Casale, D. (2013). Young Populations in Young Democracies: generational voting behaviour in sub-saharan Africa. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.*
- *Robertson, F. (2009). A Study of Youth Political Participation in Poland and Romania. London: London University College.*
- *Saha, J.L and Edwards, K. (2007). Youth and Political Participation. Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers.*
- *UNDP. (2013, September 12). Enhancing Youth Political Participation through out the Electoral Cycle: a good practice guide. Retrieved from www.undp.org: [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG\\_UN-YOUTH\\_guide-LR.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG_UN-YOUTH_guide-LR.pdf)*