

# Youth and politics



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **A CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF YOUTH AND POLITICS IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES**

The vast majority of reading on youth participation in politics shows that there has been a steady decline in youth political participation in many democratic (Pammett and Leduc 2003; O'Neill 2007). In almost every election young people are the least likely to vote and these participation rates are continuously declining (Putnam 2000; Kimberlee 2002; Gauthier 2003; Pammett and Leduc 2003). Youth membership of political parties is also dropping (Hooghes et al. 2004). In most African countries, youth constitute a majority of electoral voters, however, the legislative parliaments have less than 1% youth participation as MP's (Sigudhla 2004). In fact, research such as Putnam (2000), Kimberlee (2002), Blais et al. (2002), Blais et al. (2004), Clarke et al. (2004), Zukin et al. (2006) and Dalton (2007) provide clear indication that the more recent generations are less likely to engage in politics than were previous generations of the same age. The 'generational effects' suggests that today's young people are less active in politics, and they will never reach the levels of political participation currently displayed by the elderly (Martikainen et al. 2005). Studies indicate that the present younger generations will retain these differences as they grow older, and that consequently the present electorate will be replaced by a more passive generation of political participants (Quintelier 2007). As for youth in democratic Mauritius, all these have to be tested. Hence, most important is to identify working definitions of terms on which the project is based. Obviously, the parameters of the terms 'Youth' and 'Politics' have to be established.

## **PARAMETER OF THE TERM ‘ YOUTH[1]’ USED**

Both the first and second Mauritian National Youth Policy (2000 – 2004) and (2010 – 2014) define youth as persons aged “ between 14 and 29 living in the Republic of Mauritius”. Thus for the purpose of this dissertation, the age of youth considered does not exceed 29 years old.

## **ESTABLISHING THE WORKING DEFINITION OF POLITICS**

The definition of politics is confined to what Randall (1987) identified as forms of political participation which are as follows:

### **→ Voting**

Voting is sometimes understood as the first step in a succession of increasing demanding political acts. Marsh and Kaase (1979) (cited in Randall 1987) view it as a unique form of political behaviour in the sense that it occurs only rarely and is highly biased. Randall (1987) notes that in most countries women are more inclined to cast their vote than men.

### **→ Other Conventional Forms Of Participation**

According to Welch (1977) (cited in Randall 1987), this form of participation include campaigning for political parties or their candidates, membership of a political party or organization or attendance at a political meeting. Dowse and Hughes (1972) (cited in Randall 1987) find that women participate less men when it comes to this form of participation.

### **→ Less Conventional Politics**

Randall (1987) refers to this form of participation as ad hoc politics which means participation in political campaigns that are relatively short-lived, throwing up makeshift organizations and tending to rely on direct tactics such as pickets, squats and self-help projects. In this form of participation,  
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Randall (1987) notes that women ‘ come into their own’ and their participation is as significant as that of men.

These 3 forms of political participation have been used as indicators to serve the exploratory purpose of the research. While Levine (2007), O’Neill (2007), Braud (2004) and many others have spoken about the forms of political engagement, the theory of Randall (1987) was purposely chosen since it also deals about women’s participation for each form. Hence with the ‘ gender’ variable, the research also tests the relevance of the theory among young Mauritian. To explain the identified disengagement of youth from politics, it is important to find out what other research say and what are their theories. Hence the following theories which I have classified under 3 headings served the explanatory purpose of the research: Social change; Adults’ attitudes and actions and the Attitudes and lifecycle of young people.

## **EXPLANATORY THEORIES ABOUT THE DISENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH FROM POLITICS**

### **A. Social Change**

O’Neill (2007) notes that cell phones have been identified as a new form of political activism especially for young people. She also stresses the use on new Internet-based sites such as MySpace and Facebook which provide forums for communicating, organising and socialising and they are unlike traditional social networks that require face-to-face contact. Quintelier (2007), Hoskins et al. (2003) and O’ Toole et al. (2003) notice the attractiveness of these new forms of participation has caused younger people to divert from traditional forms of political participation as practiced by the older generation. Moreover, according to findings of Levine (2007),

Dalton (2007) and Zukin et al. although members of this generation are less engaged in traditional political activities, many are willing to provide direct voluntary services.

However in a study conducted by Blais (n. d) among young people on the island of Montreal, he finds out that non-conventional participation has not replaced conventional participation. In fact, most of the respondents either do both or do neither. As for the case of young Mauritians, this has to be tested.

### **B. Adults' attitudes and actions**

Conventional 'wisdom' dictates that young people are 'less knowledgeable', 'ignorant', 'apathetic', 'indifferent', 'alienated', 'disaffected' and 'disinterested' when it comes to politics (Eden et al. 2002; O'Toole et al. 2003; Henn et al. 2003). O'Neill (2001) add to the view that youth are also more likely to find politics uninteresting and even boring. Moreover, in a case study carried out by Golumbek (2002), adults explain the political disengagement of youth by the fact that youth only want to have fun and politics appear dull to them.

Moreover, Bessant (2004) and Eden et al. (2002) notice some restrictions, namely, in the patronizing of youth by parents and educators. This is displayed in that politicians, parents and teachers frequently deny their children or students the right to participate in protest marches when such activities take place during class hours.

### **C. The Attitudes And Lifecycle Of Young People**

Pammett and LeDuc's (2003) study clearly indicate that young people have negative attitudes towards political parties. Young people perceive politicians as 'out of touch', 'untrustworthy', 'self-interested', 'irrelevant' and 'power-hungry' (O' Toole et al. 2003; Quintelier 2007). Young people do not trust politicians believing they are corrupt and self-serving (Bennett, 1997). They are very critical and quickly recognize when politicians lie or when they try to speak on their behalf (Henn et al. 2002). More so, youth find that conventional politics carries an image problem (Edwards, 2001).

Many young people feel that they are not heard by politicians and that they ultimately cannot influence politics (Henn et al. 2002; Kimberlee 2002). Henn et al. 2002; O' Toole et al. 2003; Keeter 2003; Quintelier 2007 find that the non-participation of young people is due to the failure of the politicians to address the issues that concern them, or to make the issues relevant to their daily lives. Youth have the impression that politicians do not truly care about their needs and large percentage of young people believe that the government is unresponsive to people like them (Bennett, 1997).

Youth have fewer resources for political participation because of 'lifecycle effects' (Quintelier 2007 and Verba et al. 1995). According to these authors, political participation requires time and money and young people do not yet have a stable basis for concern with politics. Hence, they are more preoccupied with short-term projects (Verba et al. 1974; Iyengar and Jackman 2004). According to Kimberlee (1998), the decline in political interest and behaviour of young people should be attributed to the changing of social and economic environment in which young people now live.

After having established the body of theories, it is important to have an idea of the variables of the research which could at the same time be presented as some 'unique' traits of the Mauritian Politics.

## **TRAITS OF THE MAURITIAN POLITICS/ VARIABLES OF THE RESEARCH**

### **A. Gender Imbalance**

From Appendices 2 and 3, it can be observed that before 2005, the number of female MPs had never exceeded six. One would find that in many constituencies in Mauritius, women have never been elected while in most constituencies the number of nominated women is very low or women are not fielded at all. In 2005, 61 of the 645 candidates who stood for the General Elections were women (9.5%). The two major parties (MLP and MMM) which were capable of electing candidates, together fielded only 16 women. Of those 16, 11 were elected as constituency seat MPs and 1 as best-loser seat MP. The number of women in the legislature from the year 2000 to 2005 has increased from 4 to 12 (5.7% - 17%). Nonetheless, this number is nowhere near the 30% target stipulated in the SADC declaration on Gender and Development of which Mauritius is a signatory. Phillips's (1991, 1995) arguments for democracy are based on mirror representation, group representation and interest representation and Chiroro (2005) highlighted that Mauritius totally fails in terms of mirror representation. What awaits us for this year's 2010 General Elections is yet to be known.

### **B. Ethnicised Politics**

In Mauritius, the 70 member National Assembly consists of 62 elected representatives of constituencies and 8 additional seats allocated to the Best Losers among the non-elected. The latter seats are allocated on the basis of <https://assignbuster.com/youth-and-politics-essay-samples/>

ethnic membership (the first four) and a combination of ethnicity and party membership (the remaining four) (Lau Thai Keng 1999, Eriksen 1998). The main purpose of this system is to ensure an adequate representation of the minority groups (Addison et al 1993).

Eriksen (1998) notes that most political parties in Mauritius have overtly or covertly represented ethnic / communal interests. Dinan, Nababsing and Mathur (cited in Crawford Young, 1999) add that political parties in Mauritius field their candidates in constituencies not only according to ethnic configurations of the constituency but sub groups (caste, cultural and linguistic) of the voters are also considered. This might be because communalism is an important variable for voting behaviour of the population (Mathur 1991). Thus, considering the ethnic group of respondents as a variable when one does a research on politics becomes significant.

### **C. Youth Political Engagement/Disengagement**

#### **TABLE 1: CALCULATED AVERAGE AGE OF MPs IN MAURITIUS ELECTION 11TH SEPTEMBER 2000**

ELECTION 03RD JULY 2005

MPs 2005 BY 28th FEBRUARY 2010

MEAN AGE

47

49



Logically, the mean, mode and median at 28th February 2010 would be that of the year 2005 + 5 since the MPs are the same apart from few modifications (see appendix 5).

#### MODAL AGE

39

51

#### MEDIAN AGE

47

51

#### % OF YOUTH AS DEFINED AS PER THE NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

$(2 \div 66) \times 100$

= 3.03% (2 d. p)

0%

To be able to acquire this data, I have gathered and compiled the date of birth and calculated the age of MPs for the year 2000 and 2005 (SEE APPENDICES 4 AND 5). From these, the average age of MPs and the percentage of MPs which fall into the youth category for the last 2 General Elections could be obtained. While the age at which a candidate can stand for Elections is 18 and the maximum age a person is considered to be young in Mauritius is 29, the data in the above table brings us back to the

ontological assumptions made in Chapter 1 where it becomes necessary to gather primary data. Before presenting to you, the procedures and methods adopted for the collection of primary data, I wish to recapitulate what the basic research which has an exploratory and explanatory purpose aims to.

The research tries to:

→ Explore the extent of engagement/disengagement of youth in/from politics in Mauritius.

→ Determine which explanation classified under 3 headings best explains the absence of youth from formal politics.

→ Find out if today's youth will or will not reach the levels of political participation currently displayed by the elderly.

→ Explore and organize primary data so as to create a picture of the current situation of the topic in the Mauritian context.

→ Develop new hypotheses which will be matter of further testing in future research.

→ To fill in the gap of unavailable data in Mauritius and thus contribute to epistemology.

[1] The terms ' youth' and ' young people' are used interchangeably in the dissertation.