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Governmental Actions and Inactions as a Recipe for Political Participation of the Youth and Sustainable Development in Ghana, by

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Abstract

It is imperative for the youth in every democratic society to be involved in political activities since this can have a great impact on the attainment of sustainable development goals like quality education, good health and well-being, decent work and economic growth, peace, justice, and strong institutions among others. The youth mostly constitute a majority of the population, due to this, their active involvement in political activities is very crucial. However, there are certain challenges that prevent the youth from participating effectively. Focusing on interviews and responses from some students (youth) of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the study examines the impact of governmental actions and inactions on the political participation of the Ghanaian youth and how it affects sustainable development. It also examines some challenges that prevent them from participating effectively. A sample of one hundred (100), which included ten (10) interviewees and ninety (90) respondents, were conveniently and purposively sampled, respectively. The analysis arising from the data confirms that most of the actions and inactions of the government have had a negative impact on the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth. It also concludes among other things that sustainable development can be affected positively or adversely by the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Political participation, Governmental Actions, Inactions, Ghana, Youth

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Introduction

There is a need for humans to protect the planet and effectively manage scarce resources so that future generations can benefit from them. This is what is termed as sustainable development. Sustainable development, according to the Brundtland Report, "is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987). The United Nations has called for local action to be taken towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals through the implementation of appropriate policies, adjusting existing ones and adjusting the regulatory frameworks of government (UN DESA, 2022).

The United Nations has developed seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) as an initiative that seeks to end poverty and protect the planet, among others by 2030. The first SDG aims at ending poverty, the second SDG seeks to put an end to hunger, and the third SDG seeks to ensure good health and well-being. The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh SDGs focus on quality education, gender equality, and affordable and clean energy respectively. While the eighth and ninth SDGs focus on decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and infrastructure. Reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships make up the tenth to seventeenth sustainable development goals (UNDESA 2022).



Every state has a group of people who are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the country. These people are commonly referred to as Government officials. The actions and inactions of these people in authoritative positions have an impact on themselves and the entire country they govern. Essentially, the government is also responsible for the creation of policies in the country. For a government official to be seen as legitimate in a democratic space, the appointee must be chosen through elections by the people. Elections are held in various democratic societies across the globe. Smith (2004) defines elections as “an essential part of any democracy that determines who forms the next government” (Smith, 2004). Aristotle opined that election is the most democratic method as leaders who emerge turn out to be from the same geographical area, occupation, or status. The British colony of the Gold Coast, now Ghana, had its first general elections in February 1951 (Rathbone, 2016). Fast forward, Ghana is in the 4th Republic and conducts elections on the 7th of December every four years. There are certain political activities that occur before, during, and after elections that citizens participate in. Some of these activities include joining a political party, campaigning, organizing political rallies, voting, political vigilantism, constructively criticizing the incumbent government, protests, and other related activities. This is what is termed as political participation. Townsend (1969: 4) has defined political participation as all those activities individuals or citizens of a country consciously and voluntarily become involved in. This is done to give a particular direction to the conduct of public affairs of a state (Townsend, 1969).

There has been a debate among scholars on the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth. The works of scholars like Amoah (2018) indicate that the political participation of the youth in Ghana is not as low as most scholars perceive it to be. However, in earlier studies, scholars like Quintelier (2017); Resnick and Casale (2011) argued that the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth, or the youth in Africa in general, is very low. Despite this narrative, the current contribution focuses on what causes the youth’s political participation level to increase or decrease. Regardless of the current level of political participation of the youth in Ghana, there is more room for improvement. The Ghanaian youth has a major role to play in ensuring the achievement of sustainable development goals such as the reduction of poverty, ensuring quality education, clean water, and sanitation, as well as, economic growth, among others. To this end, the current contribution is to examine how the active participation of the youth in politics or related activities affects sustainable development. This is because, according to the United Nations, the youth are a very powerful force in ensuring sustainable development (United Nations, 2021).

Similar to the above, Amoah (2018) has highlighted the importance of the youth in political participation. Using Atwima Nwabiagya as a focal study, his research concluded, among other things, that the youth in this area were politically active. He also established the fact that although the youth in Atwima Nwabiagya are politically active, it cannot be generalized that all the youth in Ghana are active in politics. The above notwithstanding, the current research focuses on responses from students at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The focus on KNUST is because it is an eclectic community with students of different demographics around the country.

The above notwithstanding, Amoah (2018) makes a call for further empirical studies on the causes of the negative effects that education and unemployment have on political participation. Our research pushes the discussions further to establish the effects that government actions have on the level of political participation of the youth in Ghana. Governmental actions affect unemployment rates or status and the education of the country, which in turn is likely to affect

the political participation of the youth in the country. With this, our research answers the call by Amoah (2018) for further empirical studies on the causes of the negative effects that education and unemployment have on political participation (Amoah, 2018).

Also, Biney and Amoateng (2019) have examined how social and cultural factors influence the interest of the youth, and their decision to actively participate in political activities, by studying a sample of undergraduate students at the University of Ghana. They used focus group discussions as a data collection tool to gather data from their respondents. They examined socio-cultural factors like age, gender, education, and religion and their effects on the youth’s political participation. However, they did not capture the role of government in encouraging the political participation of the youth (Biney & Acheampong, 2019). Our research aimed at filling this hiatus by studying the actions and inactions of the government, which has the potential to influence the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth.

Furthermore, there is no recent literature on the impact of the actions and inactions of government on youth political participation and how it affects sustainable development. At least, there is none that considers the opinions of the student population of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. There is also scant literature on the effect that youth participating in politics has on sustainable development. The current research aims at filling the existing lacuna, among other things.

The youth in Ghana constitute a significant proportion of the total population of Ghanaians (Gyampo, 2012). Due to this, it is important to know their behavior towards political activities, the factors influencing it, and how it can be improved. The level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth has changed drastically in the fourth republic (Asiamah, 2015). In the sense that most of the youth in Ghana have become indifferent towards politics-related activities. The youth have lost faith in politics. Most of them feel their voices are not heard or that they are not taken seriously. This is a problem because when young people become disinterested in political activities and decide not to actively participate in formal political activities like voting and contesting for elections, among others; by inference, a significant number of the Ghanaian population would have forfeited their right to make a determination concerning who will govern them and take decisions that affect their lives in the present scheme of things and the foreseeable future. Indifference and lack of participation from the youth also mean that politicians may focus on other demographics to provide development-oriented projects or programmes that support such groups more than the youthful population.

To achieve sustainable development goals like inclusive and equitable quality education as well as lifelong learning opportunities for all, it is important that the youth become politically active. This enables them to have a voice in formulating policies that support the attainment of these sustainable development goals among others. Youth political participation is crucial for the development of policies that respond to the specific needs of the younger generations (Goudie, 2018).

Building upon the earlier elucidations, the study addresses the factors causing the drastic change in the political participation of the youth. Among other objectives, the study aims to help solve the problem of low political participation of the Ghanaian youth by shedding light on the factors that are affecting the level of political participation among the Ghanaian youth. This will contribute to an improved governance and sustainable development. Additionally, this research also studies how the actions and inactions of the government have affected the level of

political participation of the youth in Ghana. Finally, it studies how the youth being politically active, affects sustainable development.

The objectives of the research were (1) to identify the actions and inactions of government that influence the political participation of the Ghanaian youth in the fourth republic of Ghana, (2) To identify how the actions and inactions of government affect the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth, (3) to identify the challenges of the Ghanaian youth in participating effectively in Ghana's politics before, during and after elections in the fourth republic, and (4) to identify how the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth ensures sustainable development. This study also aims to add to existing literature and serve as a basis for further research. The rest of the research has been organized into three sections. The first part, which is forgone includes the introduction and method of study. The second section deals with the results of the study, findings, and discussions. The final section concludes the study.

Method of the Study

The study utilized questionnaires and unstructured interviews to gather data from the students of KNUST. Data was collected from 100 members of the KNUST community with respect to the major objectives of the research. Out of the 100 respondents, 90 completed online questionnaires. However, purposive sampling was employed in the selection of the remaining 10 interviewees. The selection of the respondents for the unstructured interviews was based on the respondent's knowledge of the research topic. The 100 respondents and interviews came from a rather eclectic population of KNUST. The choice of 100 samples served as a basis for a preliminary report that gave room for an additional wider study that would be unencumbered with time constraints in the foreseeable future. Although an African youth has been defined as a person between the ages of 15 and 35 (African Union, 2006), for this study, the focus was based on the age bracket of 18-35. This is because according to Article 42 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, the eligible voting age is 18 and above and according to some scholars, young people cannot participate politically until they become eligible voters (Nsiah, 2018).

The quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences while the qualitative data was analyzed thematically to help identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within same. The study also employed the review of scholarly literature and documents on the sustainable development goals of the United Nations to analyze how the youth can effectively contribute to the attainment of these sustainable development goals. KNUST was selected for a focal study because it has a very youthful population. This includes students and workers who are within the age bracket of 18-35 who originate from different parts of the country. This represents a fair representation of the youth in Ghana.

Results

This section provides an overview of the responses from respondents. From the data gathered, 44 respondents who represented 48.9% of the total respondents were males while 45 respondents representing 50% of the total respondents were females. However, 1 respondent constituting had refused to include the gender in the response.

Respondents were asked if their current level of political participation had been influenced by any action or inaction of any government in the fourth republic. They were also asked to provide some examples of governmental actions that had influenced their political participation. Respondents were also asked to identify whether there had been an increase or a

decrease in their level of political participation and provide the challenges that prevented them from actively participating in politics.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents, Source: Field Survey (2022)

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	44	48.9	48.9	48.9
Female	45	50.0	45.0	98.9
Prefer not to say	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

From the data gathered 8 people which represented 8.9% of a 100 total number of respondents indicated that they were very interested in Ghana's politics. 25 people representing 27.8% of the total respondents stated that they were interested in Ghana's politics. 39 people which constituted 43.3% of the total respondents were neutral. 8 people representing 8.9% of the total respondents indicated that they were uninterested while 10 people, representing 11.1% of the total respondents were very uninterested.

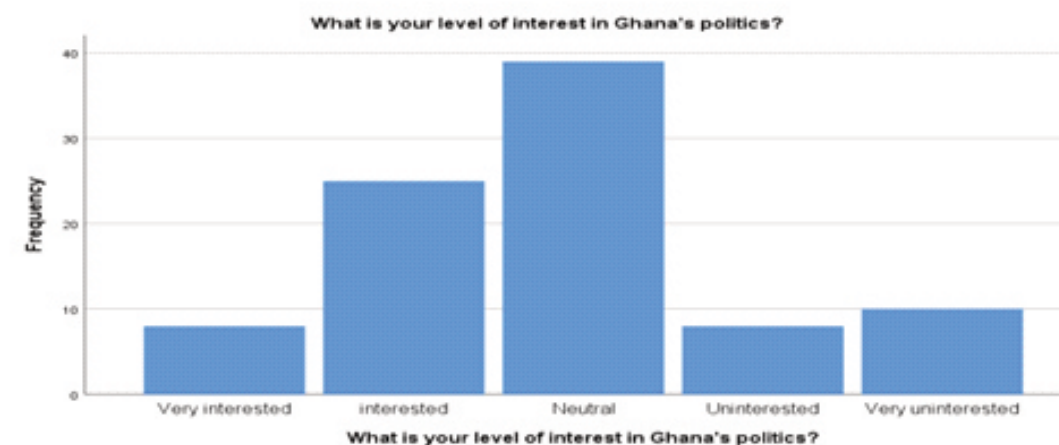


Figure 1: Respondents' Level of Interest in Ghana's Politics, Source: Field Survey (2022)

It was noticed from the data that most of our respondents were indeed very familiar with some governmental policies, and they even identified some policies that they were familiar with. 76 people (84.5%) of our respondents indicated that they were familiar with some of the policies of the government of Ghana in Ghana's 4th republic while 4 people, which constituted 4.4% of the total respondents indicated that they were not familiar with the policies of the government of Ghana. However, 10 of our respondents who made up 11.1% of our total respondents remained neutral.

The opinions of respondents regarding which campaign promises (across different governments) they felt were unfulfilled were also collected. Among the total responses, 61, representing 70.1% felt that the promise of the one district one factory by the government of Ghana in 2016 was not fulfilled, and only 1 respondent representing 1.1% felt the Free SHS in 2016 by the then opposition party (NPP) which formed government on 7th January 2017, was not fulfilled. In addition, 56 people representing 64.4% of the total respondents felt that the

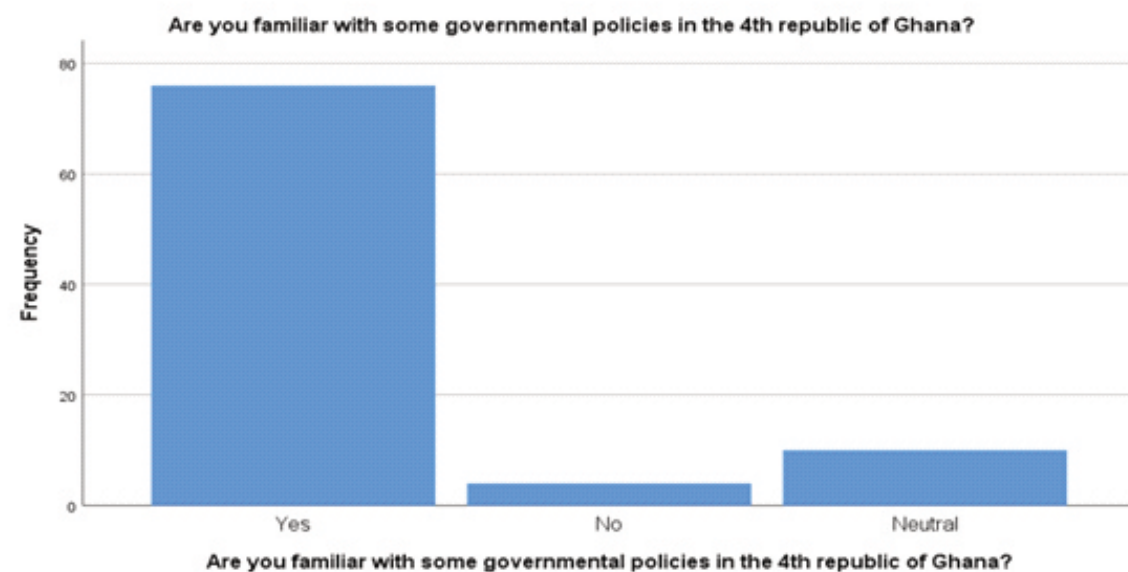


Figure 2: Respondents' Familiarity with some Governmental Policies in the 4th Republic of Ghana, Source: Field Survey (2022)

government failed to establish an office of a special anti-corruption prosecutor although they promised. 60 respondents constituting 69.0% also felt the promise of the quality SHS was not fulfilled. Respondents were given the option to include promises that they felt were not fulfilled of which 5 respondents constituting 5.7% of the total respondents did. Among such responses were quality roads, one district one dam and the failure of the government to build a robust economy, free from corruption. 2 respondents however indicated that some policies were implemented halfway. Also, 2 respondents indicated that none of the promises were unfulfilled meaning all policies were fulfilled.

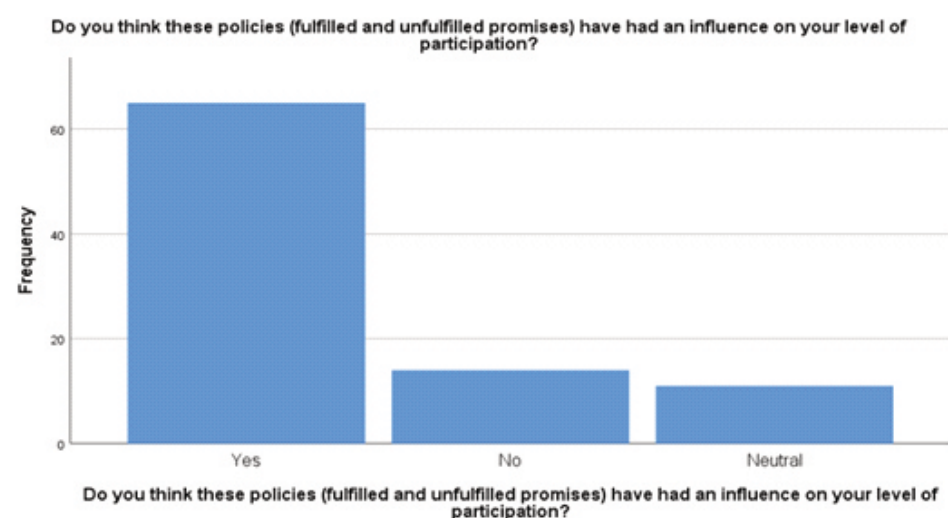


Figure 3: The Influence of Policies on the Level of Political Participation of Respondents, Source: Field Survey (2022)

Again, respondents were asked to identify whether the actions and inactions of the government had had an impact on their political participation. Data was collected from respondents about how policies whether fulfilled or unfulfilled had influenced their level of political participation.

Out of a total response of 90, representing 100% of the total respondents, 65 respondents which is 72.2% of the total respondents said the government's response to implementing policies had influenced them. 14 people which is 15.6% of the total respondents said policies had no influence on them and 11 which is 12.2% of the total respondents remained neutral.

After respondents chose whether government policies had had an influence on their level of political participation, they were allowed to choose the kind of influence government policies had had on their level of political participation. 14 respondents representing 15.6% of the total respondents stated that the influence was positive, 46 respondents constituting 51.1% confirmed that it had had a negative influence on them and 30 representing 33.3% remained neutral about the kind of influence.

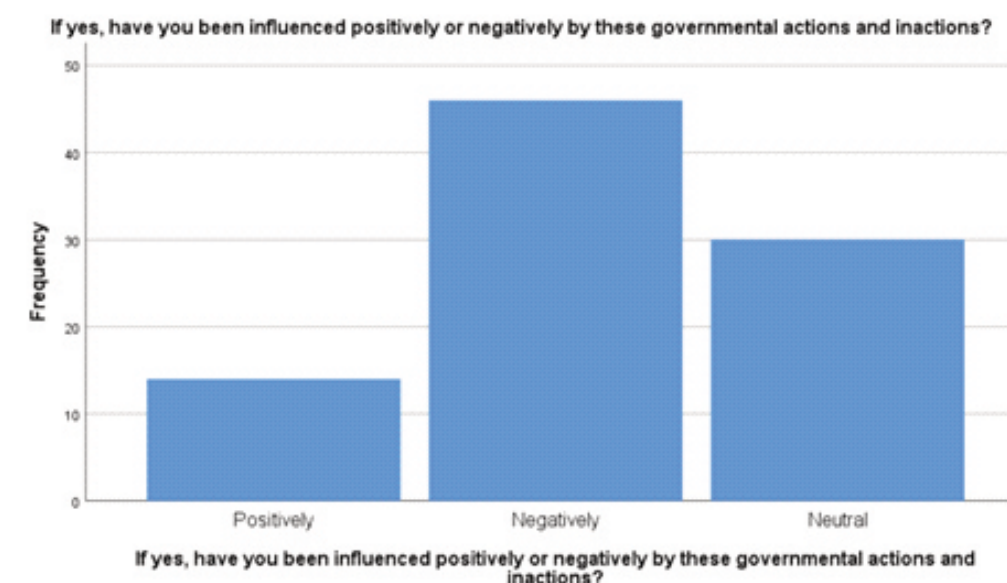


Figure 4: The Kind of Influence Policies have had on the Level of Political Participation of Respondents, Source: Field Survey (2022)

Respondents were asked to give a detailed explanation of how their level of political participation had been influenced by governmental actions. 65 respondents answered this question and out of the 65, 12 of them gave positive reasons. They indicated that the free SHS is helping them save money and also reduce the illiteracy level in the country. Concerning the respondents who gave negative reasons, 7 of them attributed it to disappointment in the government, ten (10) were based on corruption, 6 of them noted that it was based on loss of interest, 1 represented apathy, 5 incompetence of government, 15 poor implementation and failed policies and 9 complained about the hardships these policies had created in the economy.

Results and Discussions

This section also seeks to critically analyze the results from the findings from the respondents, interviewees, and the literature. In this section, we compare our results with the already existing literature to provide a useful synthesis among other things.

- *Actions and Inactions of Government (Policies) that Influence Political Participation of the Ghanaian Youth in the Fourth Republic of Ghana*

Kpesa (2011) argues that public participation in the policy process is considered to be a significant pillar of good governance (Kpessa, 2011). This argument by Kpesa (2011) reiterates the need for the youth to be actively involved in political processes.

Respondents were familiar with governmental policies as they were able to mention some of the actions and inactions of the government in the fourth republic. It was also very clear that they did not only know about governmental policies but were also aware of the promises that were made by the government before they came to power and the ones that were fulfilled or not fulfilled. For instance, 70.1% of the respondents identified that the one district one factory policy was not fulfilled. Respondents stated certain policies like Agenda 111, high imposition of taxes (e-levy tax, Covid-19 tax, taxes on sanitary pads), free SHS, NHIS, maternity health care, populism policies (free water, free electricity during the COVID period), failed road policies, unfulfilled promises like a promise to make Accra the cleanest city, the building of sky train, promising a year of roads, one village one dam, amongst others. From this data, it was concluded that the youth were very knowledgeable about state politics, and they seemed to observe the activities of the state.

The current finding contradicts the findings of Adu-Gyamfi (2020) who argues that the youth are not aware of the policies implemented by the government (Adu-Gyamfi, 2020). According to Knapp and Ferrante (2012), awareness is a general state of employee knowingness or mindfulness about specific issues (Knapp & Ferrante, 2012). Malaysian Science and Technology Information Center (2019) also defines awareness as a person's state of knowledge about an issue as a result of his or her having heard about it, seen it, or felt its existence (MASTIC 2019). Lyons et al (2012) attribute this level of political awareness to certain factors like the low performance of governments, high political competition, and when political parties in the country are ideologically divided (Lyons, Jaeger, & Wolak, 2012). The authors argue that when states are performing poorly, or political competition is fierce, there is a high probability that citizens would pay attention to what government does or does not do. Also, when the political parties in the state are ideologically divided, citizens are most aware of state politics.

72.2% of the total respondents to the questionnaire said that they had been influenced by the actions and inactions of the government while all the interviewees said that governmental actions and inactions had had an impact on their level of political participation. With this, it can be argued that the actions of the government influence how some Ghanaian youth engage in political activities in the country. This data answers a fundamental question in the research- Do the actions and inactions of the government have an impact on the political participation of the Ghanaian youth? Our findings buttressed the findings of Resnick et al (2011). In their research, they argued that the youth's decision to participate in political activities is affected by the number of years the incumbent government has been in power and the performance of the incumbent government especially in the creation of jobs.

- *How the Actions and Inactions of Government Affect the Level of Political Participation of the Ghanaian Youth*

It has been established that the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth is influenced by the actions and inactions of the government, we then look at how the actions and inactions of the government affect the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth. After asking respondents whether the actions and inactions of the government had affected their level of political participation positively or negatively, the majority indicated that they had been influenced negatively. However, few of the respondents indicated that the failure of the government to live up to their expectations served as a source of motivation for them to actively engage in political activities. However, their involvement was aimed at changing the status quo. A respondent specifically said that the failure of the NDC government to implement sound

policies and their inaction to nib corruption in the past made him desire to enter politics and help to correct the mistakes of the NDC government. He puts it this way,

You see, the previous government was tainted with corruption and then their failure to deal with it is also what will propel certain groups of people like me and a whole lot of others... You can mention the COCOBOD Scandal, and the Venture Capital issue (Interviewee 2022).

There have been so many debates surrounding the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth. Some researchers have argued that the level of political participation is very low and keeps on decreasing (Quintelier, 2007). The findings of our research buttress this argument by these scholars that the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth is very low. Other scholars also argue that the youth is not weak in politics. In his study concerning the Ghanaian youth in Kumasi, Nsiah (2018) argued that the youth in Ghana are politically active. This argument was supported by the findings of Amoah (2018). He also conducted a research study on the level of political participation of the youth using Atwima Nwabiagya District as a case study and concluded that the youths in that district were very active in politics. It has been stated elsewhere in this study that sometimes low achievements of governments do not always decrease the level of political participation by the youth. However, it makes them more active in political activities in their bid to change the status quo and bring development to Ghana. This is in line with the argument that was propounded by Amoah (2018). He argued that many African countries are facing the problem of bad governance and low development. Therefore, "the youth in Ghana and Africa hope for good governance for their country to develop. This is an issue which is very dear to the hearts of the Ghanaian youth" (Amoah 2018).

An interviewee who used to be affiliated to the NPP party also said he used to be involved in political activities, but the respondent's level of political participation has reduced because the respondent was disappointed in the government. He puts it this way, "I think what we were told and what is happening now are entirely two different things. It means, one.

As people or as youth, we can't trust political leadership, we can't build hopes around whatever policies that they intend to bring and then thirdly too, it's just a matter of disappointment. Me getting disappointed in who I thought could have done something better (Interviewee 2022).

This buttresses the argument by Biney and Acheampong (2019) that "the relatively low participation in politics by the youth is the result of their sense of corruption and distrust in politics..." (Biney & Acheampong, 2019). A factor of the low political participation of the youth could be attributed to their distrust in politics and their general disappointment in the government.

Other respondents said their level of political participation had been negative from the start and has either declined further or remained that way. Verba et al. (1995) attribute a negative level of political participation to the absence of factors that contribute to engagement including motivations, capabilities, and opportunities. From the responses gotten from the respondents, this negative level of political participation was influenced by the actions and inactions of governments in the fourth republic of Ghana. A respondent said the trend of populism and the government's attempt to engage in reactionary politics has dire consequences for the government of Ghana.

... maybe a trend of populism, just trying to engage in reactionary politics, given that people want to hear good things, especially freebies or things that are given without cost, politicians tend to engage in redistribution on a mass scale even though it has long-term consequences. An example is the free SHS, free water, and electricity bill that we got during the Covid-19 period (Interviewee 2022).

According to him, the government engages in tokenism just to get the votes of the masses and the government is not concerned about the economic growth or development of the country. This aligns with Biney and Acheampong's (2019) argument that the youth do not trust Ghanaian politicians. Certain policies of the government like the e-levy, and ex-gratia, amongst others were cited by most of the respondents as actions of government that made them to be less involved in Ghanaian political activities.

- *Challenges of the Youth in Participating Effectively in Ghana's Politics before, during, and after Elections in the Fourth Republic*

From our research study, it was realized that aside from the actions and inactions of the government, there are other factors that influence the political participation of the Ghanaian youth. This section seeks to discuss the challenges that prevent the youth from participating effectively in Ghana's politics using the data that was gathered from our findings. The interviewees and questionnaire respondents gave detailed information with respect to the challenges that prevent young people from effectively participating in political activities.

Respondents talked about the unfriendly political climate, the violence and radicalization of the political system, the notion that politics is a dirty game and the extreme extent some individuals go into politics, and the danger associated with politics in general.

Two interviewees talked about the fact there is this notion that politics is a dirty game. Most youths of today associate politics with all sorts of negative vices.

There are equally popular notions about how politics is a dirty game and how it is dangerous and how people go to the farthest extents just to accumulate power and to hold political positions. This sometimes creates a certain level of disinterest for me because I want to feel safe and protected and the very nature in which politics is described makes it feel very unsafe and dangerous (Interview 2022).

Alieke (2022) has also described politics as dirty. According to him, for an individual to get into politics, he or she would have to do something dishonorable behind the scenes or in his own words, "play dirty". He also says that there are a lot of betrayals and backstabbing in politics and political campaigns (Alieke, 2022). An interviewee hinted:

I think apart from governmental actions and inactions, the political climate in Ghana is not so friendly. Due to the existing party rivalry in the country, people are associated with the activities of the party they support (Interviewee 2022).

According to the above respondent, the fact that involving in political activities means people attributing you to the negative practices of the government and chastising you for the government's failures makes it difficult for the respondents to get involved in politics. He also mentioned party rivalry as a factor that discourages him from participating in politics-related activities.

Another also talked about election violence, the rise of political vigilantes and the radicalization of the political system. A practical example of electoral violence that happened in Ghana is the Ayawaso West Wuogon by-elections that occurred in Accra in 2019 following the death of the incumbent MP, Emmanuel Kyeremateng Agyarko on 21 November 2018. According to Sulley (2020), the lethal weapons that were used during the violence even terrified the police officers to the extent that they could not even provide security for the voters. Six persons were injured as a result of gunshots. This violence was allegedly orchestrated by vigilante groups affiliated with the governing NPP. "Frustrated NDC activists and party members were filmed accusing the government of orchestrating the attack as critically injured persons were rushed to the hospital" (Sulley, 2020). This affects the level of political participation of the youth and the citizens at large. This is because it creates fear and panic among electorates or voters and some citizens are likely to be deterred from going to the polling station to vote as they can get caught up in the violence incited by these vigilante groups. Violence in elections affects political participation negatively, it exacerbates the unwillingness of citizens to vote on Election Day or even participate in politically related activities. Even after elections, some of these vigilante groups have been known to cause trouble and disturb the peace of the country. A practical example of this happened during the aftermath of the NPP election victory in December 2016. Political vigilante groups affiliated with the NPP government, Delta Force, went on a rampage destroying public property and even attacking members of their party. According to Sulley (2020), the people were angered by the appointment of George Agyei as regional secretary advisor for the Ashanti Region by President Akuffo Addo. They stormed his office and forcefully removed him. They claimed he had contributed too little to the party to be given such an appointment.

Another respondent cited the increasing level of violence and radicalization of the political system as factors that prevent him from participating in political activities. He added that citizens are not assured of their safety when they go out to vote because of the possible outbreak of violence. These two respondents highlighted the dangers that are associated with getting involved in politics as a factor that prevents them from participating effectively in politics. The second respondent focused on the violence that breaks out in polling stations on Election Day and how this makes it unsafe for him to even go out to vote not to talk about engaging in other political activities and the fact that the political system has been radicalized.

The first respondent mostly focused on some of the popular notions surrounding politics; how it is a dirty game and how people go through extreme means to accumulate and retain power. Four (4) respondents indicated that their families had a role to play in their lack of interest in participating effectively in politics. Eight (8) of them said bad leadership accounted for their low participation level in Ghanaian politics, while two (2) indicated that economic hardship was responsible for their low level of political participation. Two (2) of the respondents blamed their inability to participate effectively in political participation on the citizens' bad attitude and five (5) of the respondents said that corruption in high and low offices affected their participation level.

- *How the Level of Political Participation of the Ghanaian Youth Affects Sustainable Development.* The current youth of the country are the future leaders. Due to this, when the youth are given the opportunity to effectively participate in political activities, they will be better prepared to become good leaders in the future. Increasing political participation of the youth in a country can affect most sustainable development goals both positively and negatively depending on the level of participation. Since the youth will take charge in the near future, their active

participation in politics will bring about an increase in sustainable development goals. The active involvement of the youth in political activities can lead to the youth pushing for developmental policies like more schools and quality education, and good healthcare which are in line with the sustainable development goals as adopted by the United Nations. Also, with respect to the eighth sustainable development goal, which focuses on decent work and economic growth, the youth are in a better position to push for policies that are in line with this sustainable development goal. This is because they are most affected by this. There has been a high rate of unemployment among the youth in Ghana (Owusu-Ansah & Poku, 2012). This high level of unemployment amongst the youth in Ghana leads to increased levels of poverty and hunger. This is because they will not be able to get a stable source of income which will help them to cater for themselves. When the youth engage actively in political activities, they will work towards reducing unemployment rates in Ghana by way of electing people who share in their vision and can be held accountable for their actions and inactions. In simpler terms, the higher the level of political participation the higher the possibility for the attainment of the sustainable development goals. As stated earlier, according to the Bruntland Report, “Sustainable development is one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Bruntland, 1987). Political participation on the other hand has to do with “almost every activity by some citizen” (vanDeth, 2001).

As previously stated, the actions and inactions of the people in authoritative positions have an impact on themselves and the entire country. These actions and inactions of government officials have had an impact on the level of political participation of the youth in Ghana over the years. Although political participation can have a positive effect on sustainable development, looking at the responses received from our respondents, the actions and inactions of the government have led to the youth of Ghana losing faith and interest in the politics of Ghana and further leading to the decline in political participation. This will greatly affect sustainable development goals such as promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, sustainable economic growth, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, in Ghana. It is crucial that the youth take an active part in the decision-making process of the country by electing leaders and contesting for political positions geared towards achieving sustainable development goals like promoting full and productive employment, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education as well as ensuring access to affordable and reliable energy among others. This is because there is a need to attain generational equity when policies are being formulated and implemented. Hilda Nekabuye in Benkenstein et al (2020) reported that young people and the youth are at the centre of this movement because it is their future and that of their children that is at stake (Benkenstein et al, 2020).

Sustainable Development is not necessarily about the future, it is also about finding better ways of doing things, both for the future and the present. People might need to change the way they work and live now. Also, the youth must be encouraged to engage and show tremendous interest in the development of the country. The youth in many respects have become indifferent to the politics of Ghana, they do not engage in decision-making as expected. The implications are dire, it can adversely affect sustainable development goals in many aspects as stated above.

Sustainable development is also a way of organizing society so that it can exist in the long term. The way development is approached, and the impacts of decisions made by governmental officials affect everyone. The youth’s collective actions can therefore add up to real change. But the level of political participation in the country is declining making it difficult to foresee the attainment of more sustainable development goals in the future. When the youth feel like their

voices are not being heard, they become apathetic to whatever goes on in the country. It can be ascertained that regardless of what they do or regardless of the number of times they sit on social media to support a movement and criticize a policy, they will not be paid enough attention and their efforts will be futile. This is problematic because as stated earlier, the youth are the driving force of sustainable development goals. Through their social media campaigns, among others, they are able to create awareness concerning pressing or challenging issues in society that might need the government’s attention. Within the scheme of things, the youth are able to generate further interest in national discourses especially pertaining to politics and development. Indeed, if government heeds the call of the youth on these platforms, it will increase political participation and further impact sustainable development positively.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the responses in the study, it was concluded that the level of political participation among the respondents from KNUST who are Ghanaian youth is very low. A continuous depletion concerning their level of political participation could affect the attainment of sustainable development goals such as promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, sustainable economic growth, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels among other things. Also, the study confirms that the actions and inactions of respective governments affect the level of political participation of the Ghanaian youth.

Matters arising from the discussions show the need to increase the political participation of the Ghanaian youth and all other citizens in Ghana in a manner that can bring about sustainable development. Respective governments must be interested in analyzing the long-term effects of policies before implementation. This has the tendency to reduce the disappointments of the youth in governments and deal with the quandary of loss of faith in the constitutional democratic arrangement of the Fourth Republic. Analyzing these policies before implementation will also increase the viability of achieving meaningful results concerning the same. If the youth then gain faith in the government, sustainable development will not be in oblivion.

Again, we infer from the respective sections of the discussions that when there is a system in place that puts a check on the government to see to it that government does all or most of what they promised to do during their time of campaign, the youth shall regain their interest in participating in politics. This has the propensity to ensure sustainable development goals as highlighted in different sections of this research. It can be postulated that this can be achieved through checks and balances, especially from parliament and other relevant agencies and institutions that can put pressure on the government to act promptly to promote or provide the public good. Again, the existing literature and this study, confirms the argument that governments should own up to their failures or mistakes instead of trying to make themselves feel better by arguing that the other government or an opposing regime performed worst when they were in power. This is what is called the “blame game”. When governments accept their limitations, they shall build trust in the people and increase the level of political participation of the youth and further increase the possibility of achieving a developmental objective, which is much more sustainable. Indeed, the collective actions of the Ghanaian youth also add up to real change. Therefore, it is envisaged that Ghanaians would learn to vote based on competency and also scrutinize existing governments by avoiding party affiliation biases. By ensuring the same, governments that shall emerge from such a well-ordered democratic process with

massive youthful engagements may lead to sustainable economic growth and attainment of other sustainable development goals.

We further infer from the discussions that governmental actions should be focused on addressing the problem of corruption and corrupt officials should be publicly punished to serve as a deterrence to others and to show to the people that government and governance can deliver the public good. Here, it is envisaged that the public, including the youth, shall be given extensive education on the policy ideas of each political party that will be implemented when they form a government after winning an election. This will help them make a well-informed decision in the next elections, which demands that a government is retained in office or voted out as a result of lack of development. It is a truism that the youth in particular cannot lose faith in a programmatic agenda, which is efficiently delivered to meet the needs of the citizenry.

It is also expedient to argue that more youth should be appointed into political offices or positions, where they can actively participate in the formulation of policies. With this, the youth can promote the formulation of policies that will lead to their progress and attainment of sustainable development. This has wider implications for Ghana's democracy, which is in pursuit of sustainable development.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

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