

POLITICAL DISTRUST AND INTENTION TO MIGRATE ABROAD: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF YOUTH IN SOUTH-EAST OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing concern about the ever-increasing intention of people to relocate to other countries. The trend is pervasive among young individuals and creates the path for illegal migration and burdens immigration policies. Although much has been documented about migration motives, little is known about the contribution of political distrust in emigration. The present paper investigated young people's intention to migrate abroad based on political distrust. Six hundred and fifteen youth were conveniently pooled from different locations in southeast Nigeria for the survey. They completed a self-report measure of migration intention and perceived political distrust. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Data from the respondents were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, version 17). A simple linear regression was performed on the data. The result indicated that political distrust statistically significantly predicted intention to migrate at $\beta = .932, p < .05$. An observation of the adjusted square revealed that political distrust contributed about 23.6% of the variation in intention to migrate abroad among the youth.

KEYWORDS: *Political distrust, intention to migrate, youth, southeast*

Migration, defined as the movement of people from one economy to another (WorldBank, 2009), has risen to the forefront of current international discussions (Santos & Brasil, 2020). People entering nations other than their own without legal paperwork have become a significant source of worry. Many critical political, economic, and humanitarian issues arise due to migration from the poor world to other regions of the world (Mbaye, 2014). Illegal migration, often known as undocumented, irregular, or unlawful migration (Donato & Massey, 2016), is a broad phrase that encompasses a wide range of situations and transnational mobility patterns. Illegal migration, on the other hand, has no commonly acknowledged definition. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Illegal migration is a movement that occurs outside of a country's borders (IOM, Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, 2017). The trend is a global issue (Perkowska, 2016) and has attracted huge research attention in recent decades (Baldwin-Edwards, 2008; Danilov, 2020; Demmelhuber, 2011; Hasan, 2019; Jovanović, 2019; Kis-Benedek, 2016; Mangin & Zenou, 2016; Mbaye, 2014; Schluter & Warhba, 2021; Solovev & Urda, 2020; Vlasova, 2019).

For decades, the incidents of migration of individuals from Africa to Europe and America have been observed across the world. The growing media coverage of individuals landing on European shores demonstrates how eager most people are to leave their nation at any cost to find a better life. However, even though a massive number of illegal migrants from Africa arrive in European countries regularly and a large number of them die in transit, the majority of literature on unlawful migration focuses on Mexico and the United States (Gathmann, 2008; Hanson, 2006; Hartman, 2011; Reichert & Massey, 2014; Gonzalez & Ziga, 2014). There is a lack of research on illegal migration from Africa to Europe. Illegal migration, in particular, becomes difficult to trace since it occurs outside of a country's regulatory standards and is often intended to avoid detection. While the tendency of migrants to enter a host country without adequate paperwork is not new (de Haas, 2008), new techniques for illegal migration have emerged that appear to circumvent stringent immigration regulations and border restrictions. Migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa followed the Maghreb route, which took them over the desert to reach their intended European destinations. However, tightened border laws and rising organized crime have sparked a significant boat movement pattern from Africa's continents. In addition, many migrants enter Europe with forged passports, often with the help of officials.

The growing number of migrants fleeing Africa's social, economic, and political problems poses a significant challenge for receiving nations struggling to restrict the flood of unauthorized migrants. According to the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (2017), over 7000 unlawful migrants have died or gone missing. More than half of the disaster casualties were found around the Mediterranean, with the majority being from Africa. While illegal migrants face greater health risks, despondency, significant financial loss, and famine, the social, economic, and security costs are borne by host nations have prompted the implementation of unprecedented measures to deal with the migrant inflow (Arenas-Hidalgo, 2016). Regardless, many young people continuously consider moving to another country through the back channels. The dangers associated with illegal migration have been widely discussed in the literature (Amenta et al., 2021; Arenas-Hidalgo, 2016; Kasar & Dourgnon, 2014; Krcmery & Kulkova, 2014; Manik, 2016; Pavlidiss et al., 2018; Pinchi et al., 2017; Setrana, 2021; Teffera, 2019; Yahaya, 2020).

Many African youths have continued to be driven by the need to survive and seek a better life in Europe and other parts of the world to go on perilous journeys to Europe and other parts of the world. People migrate to wealthy nations for various reasons, including to escape poverty, starvation, unemployment, and instability, as well as to compete with others and reach a specific level. Young Nigerians are at the top of the population's list of those who want to migrate from Africa to the developed world. In Nigeria, most illegal migration occurs among young people aged 18 to 35. In comparison to older individuals, who are more likely to be married, with more obligations and less energy to resist the rigors of migration, most persons in this age bracket are unmarried and have the strength to withstand the turbulence of irregular travel (Ikuteyijo, 2012). Most migrants engaged in the 2016 Mediterranean Sea catastrophe were primarily from Nigeria (Nwalutu, 2016). Despite the increased mortality and morbidity associated with unauthorized border crossings, these individuals, generally in their youth, go on difficult travels throughout the world. As a result, understanding the underlying motivation for starting on an undocumented journey is critical to stemming the flow.

Economic concerns, unemployment, personal goals, anxieties, insufficient essential utilities for existence, environmental degradation, and social conditions have driven many young Nigerians to migrate to other parts of the world. Furthermore, job recruitment by foreign agents, the prospects for better education, increasing earning power, and cultivating improved living conditions through access to an enhanced economic setup and advanced infrastructural framework lacking in Nigeria are all factors contributing to the trend in illegal migration among young people. Although the tendency cuts across Nigeria's regions, the current study focuses on young people in the southeast and their desire to relocate overseas.

Political distrust and intention to migrate abroad

Over the years, trust in the government and the political system has continued to erode. There are growing indications suggesting that contemporary democratic societies are regularly undergoing an increasing trend of political distrust (Bertsou, 2019). Indeed, citizens' growing distrust of the government and political system may be attributed to rising social instability in many cultures. Political mistrust is a collective attitude that resonates with views of dishonesty, fraud, untrustworthiness, and selfishness that characterize the political system and its institutions. Citizens' dissatisfaction with the political system is reflected in political mistrust. Specifically, there are signs of mistrust toward the Nigerian

government, primarily due to unfulfilled commitments. Previous research has found a correlation between political mistrust and non-compliance with government policies (Banaji, 2008; Ezeibe et al., 2020).

The political ecosystem in southeast Nigeria has proven not to have opportunities for younger individuals. However, the youth are mobilized for political activities and have been used for personal political goals by the political actors in the region. In particular, the inability of the government to fulfill its promises, create a favorable environment, provide a sustainable mechanism that could accommodate the youth, ensure the security of her young citizens, and secure a conducive future for the youth decreases patriotism and exacerbates distrust of the government. And might potentiate the intention to migrate to countries with better opportunities. Migration is a common phenomenon in southeast Nigerian society. The rate of migration in the region is one of the highest in the country, and those who migrate are often the youths. Intimations suggest that nearly one in ten households in the southeast of Nigeria has one of its members abroad or has attempted to migrate overseas. Thus, the primary purpose of the present study is to examine political distrust as a scarcely explored variable that could exacerbate the intention to relocate abroad among the youth in southeast Nigeria.

Hypothesis: *Political distrust would significantly predict the intention to migrate abroad among the youth in southeast Nigeria.*

Method

Participants

The participant for the present study comprised young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years residing in the southeast states of Nigeria. The rationale for targeting this cohort is because the objective of the survey primarily emphasized the youth's intention to migrate abroad. The participants were approached in different locations in Enugu, Imo, and Anambra States, Nigeria, between January and April 2022. They were specifically instructed on the study's goal and were also advised that the survey was optional and that they might opt-out at any moment. Six hundred and forty-three young people agreed to take part in the study. Those who signed the consent form were then handed the study's instrument to fill out on the spot. They were advised to seek clarity on any apparent uncertainty. Six hundred and fifteen (615) copies of the questionnaire were filled correctly and used for statistical analysis, while the remaining eighteen (28) copies were eliminated due to incorrect filling.

Measures

A structured questionnaire was utilized to collect information. The instrument is a five-point Linkert scale. The questionnaire items were generated from relevant literature to measure political mistrust, overall assessment of government action, and desire to migrate. The survey was divided into sections: A and B. Part A assesses the political system's cognitive, emotive, and behavioral aspects. Part B covers questions concerning migration intentions. As a result, the measure was subjective, and respondents were required to self-report their understanding of the factors. Following pilot research with participants from outside the study population, the scale received a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.79.

Result

The research used a cross-sectional survey design. The statistical software for social sciences was used to examine the data from the respondents (SPSS, version 17). The data were subjected to a basic linear regression. Political mistrust was statistically significant in predicting illegal migration ($p = .932, p < .05$.) in the study. The corrected square indicated that political mistrust accounted for around 23.6 percent of the difference in youths' intentions to migrate overseas.

Table: 1

The table shows the influence of political mistrust on the intention to migrate abroad.

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-1.77	.076		-23.31	.000
Political distrust	.932	.032	.932	26.05	.000
R^2	236				

Discussion

The present paper investigated young people's intention to migrate abroad based on political distrust. Six hundred and fifteen youth pooled from different locations in the southeast states responded to the study questionnaire. The data from their response was analyzed using the simple linear regression model. The analysis indicated a positive interaction between political distrust and the intention to migrate at $\beta = .932, p < .05$. Most importantly, political distrust was found to explain about 23.6% of the variation in youth's intention to migrate abroad in southeast Nigeria. Accordingly, the result supported the study's expectation that political distrust would predict the intention to migrate abroad among the youth. This means that young people who perceive the political ecosystem as untrustworthy and incapable of fulfilling numerous promises and affecting their responsibilities are more likely to display emigration potential. Likewise, the finding presupposes that political distrust exacerbates the experience of illegal migration, especially where the due processes seem unmet. Indeed, the failure of the government and the political system to adequately create an enabling environment for her teeming youth instigates disbelief and the motivation to seek a better future in another setting. The present study presumes that political

distrust as a psychosocial variable reflects a significant determinant of the willingness to relocate. Thus, the intention to migrate abroad combines behavioral adaptations elicited by evaluation and perception of the entire political landscape. The trend has severe implications for the mental and overall well-being of the youths.

Conclusion

The present study examined political distrust as a previously unexplored factor in the intention to migrate abroad among the youth in southeast Nigeria. The regression analysis performed on the data indicated that political distrust is a significant predictor of young people's irregular relocation to other countries. More so, the result entails that political trust is a pathway to acquiring a mindset relative to emigration. The finding has implications for research and immigration policies. Although the study is challenged with some limitations, for example, self-report measures have been criticized for the issue of common variance. Further research should adopt multiple approaches for data collection to minimize biased reporting. Also, the sampling method poses a challenge for generalization. A more comprehensive sampling technique is required to build a generalizable outcome. Nonetheless, the study contributed to the literature by revealing political distrust as a factor contributing to the youth's intention to migrate abroad. Improving political performance is a straightforward and recognized approach to bettering political disbelief. Unfortunately, it is not feasible in present-day society. Distrust based on perceptions of unequal practices and unfair outcomes can be reversed if policy-makers and politicians promote shared notions of equality and fairness, even reinforcing the monitoring mechanisms to limit morally reprehensible conduct relative to youth's doubt in the system. Further research is needed to broaden our knowledge of other intervening variables in the relationships between political distrust and irregular migration.

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