# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA: INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS AS A PANACEA TO DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

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**Abstract**

*This paper is designed to offer insights on the intertwined nature of political participation of the marginalized minorities and democratic elections in Africa. By relying on a systematic review of literature, the paper draws on evidence from extant empirical and theoretical literature to make a case for inclusion of minority and vulnerable portions of the population into mainstream political processes as a panacea to democratic elections in Africa. This paper portends that by incorporating the issues and interests of the minorities in political participation, countries can realize democratic elections. Drawing from the pernicious polarization theory, literature reveals that various segments of the society distrust each other to the extent that they are in constant and endemic disharmony. Due to differing interests of political entrepreneurs, politicians pursue political goals by leveraging polarization methods. One of the ways of achieving such an end is through using divisive voter mobilization strategies that often ostracizes minority groups. Furthermore, cultural dispositions in Africa greatly disadvantages marginalized groups in political involvement. This has partly been exacerbated by lopsided policies that have done little in ensuring that the most vulnerable members of the society are integrated into political participation. As a consequence, huge sections of the society are left out of the electoral processes leading to high-handed elections. In Africa and for a long time, many constituents of the society have been alienated from mainstream decision-making since their voices are not mirrored through democratic elections. Partly because of culture, which ostracizes large lumps of the society, political exclusion is often a norm rather than an exception in Africa's political*

*processes. The paper relied on a systematic literature review approach and was conceptual in nature, which gives room for inclusive political participation and representation researchers, scholars and practitioners to critique its propositions.*

*Keywords: Politics, political participation, marginalized groups, democratic processes, elections*

## INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Africa is one of the most unpredictable political phenomena owing to the multiplicity of factors that support or hinder electoral outcomes. One of the widely cited causes of undemocratic electoral outcomes in Africa is low inclusion of marginalized groups, such as the people living with disability, minority communities/ethnicities/races, age, gender, among others (Nchofoung, *et al.,* 2021). Without incorporation of disadvantaged members of the society into political participation, elections will not reflect the face of the people and thus will be deemed undemocratic since the will of the most vulnerable has not been co-opted into electoral participation (Bangura, 2018). Many researches (for example, Ngcaweni & Saloojee, 2021; Virendrakumar et al., 2018) have mooted the place of expanding political inclusion of the views of the minority groups during and after electoral process. In other words, African countries should strive to ensure that all persons are free to participate in politics, whether as candidates or voters.

The assertion of political inclusion has been supported by a number of studies (see, among others, Akinyetun, 2021; Nchofoung, *et al.,* 2021). To that end, social inclusion in the political process is key in ensuring that marginalized groups are integrated into the electoral process. This will not only enhance their participation through inclusion, but will also ensure that they are part of the decision-making. There is resounding evidence on how large segments of the population are disbarred from political involvement mainly because of their sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, gender, among other identity related factors (Htun & Ossa, 2013). As the debate on democratic elections simmers in the mainstream literature, questions continue to linger on what can be done to mainstream inclusivity issues in the political process so that elections are not only seen as open and fair, but also progressive. This is partly what the paper intends to highlight in addition to some of the pertinent challenges to political participation of the marginalized groups.

Persistence of social ostracism in the political partaking by marginalized groups has been a topic of debate for many decades as scholars continue to draw interlinkages between political inclusion and democratic processes (Cruz-Saco, 2008). There is wealth of literature on the said interplay since engaging minority or marginalized groups will greatly increase their

voices in the political process (Pande, 2003). As a result, countries or societies will address economic and social inequities brought about by exclusion of some portions of the population. This paper conceptualizes political participation as a holistic approach of involving various segments of the population in the political, economic, environmental, social, and cultural issues. From the perspective of democratic elections, political participation is seen as an integrated approach of engaging various portions of the citizens in traditional political activities, such as taking part in elections as observers, candidates, or voters. Despite the scholarship in the area of political participation, there is dearth of information on the interplay between inclusion of marginalized groups and democratic elections in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the paucity of academic and policy attention to this specific theme, this paper attempts to offer a nuanced perspective into the place and relevance of involving and engaging debarred members of the society into mainstream political process since this will bring forth sustainable panaceas to the electoral democracy in Africa. Importantly, the paper highlights key challenges and opportunities for political inclusivity of marginalized groups.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Cultural dispositions in Africa have greatly disadvantages minority and marginalized groups in political involvement. This has partly been exacerbated by lopsided policies that have done little in ensuring that the most vulnerable members of the society are integrated into political participation (Htun & Ossa, 2013). As a consequence, huge sections of the society are left out of the electoral process leading to high-handed elections. It's worth noting that elections only reflect the will of the people when various portions of the society are incorporated in political decision-making. In Africa and for a long time, many fragments of the society have been alienated from mainstream decision-making since their voices are not mirrored through democratic elections. For instance, women's rights to vote in many Africa societies is still a mirage. Partly because of culture, which ostracizes large lumps of the society, political exclusion is often a norm rather than an exception in Africa's political process (Karp & Banducci, 2008). Drawing evidence from various Africa countries, such as Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, among others, many rural communities are patriarchal and see politics as a man's job. For instance, despite the population of women, many of them do not vote nor are they voted since most shy from participating in politics. This has been compounded by partisan politics that alienates a substantial chunk of the citizens to participate in politics (Schwartz, 2017).

While there have been efforts to increase participation of marginalized groups in many parts of the world, the same cannot be generalized to the African context. The voices of the minority and the most vulnerable members of the society are still left out of critical decision-

making contexts (Kirmayer, 2012). Deprived of political participation, their voices are not embedded into conventional political processes. This often leads to poor legislations that could otherwise increase their integration into established electoral laws. Without meaningful legal reforms, many countries in Africa have not incorporated issues of the marginalized groups into electoral processes (Bunyasi & Smith, 2019). Furthermore, there is low advocacy and sensitization of young people (youth) who often do not participate in electoral processes. Statistics indicate that half (50%) of the youth do not participate in elections (Okafor, 2011). This could be attributed to the perceived under-representation and/or non-involvement in important governance decision-making.

Inclusion of marginalized groups in political participation continues to gather substantial debate. Much attention has been drawn to the culture of most Africa societies that often hinder participation of the vulnerable and minority groups (Raleigh, 2010). For instance, many minority groups in Kenya, such as the Makonde community were debarred from political participation because they did not possess requisite citizenship (Ndubi, 2017). For a long time, they were left out of the political spaces since they did not have voting rights. This evidence points to the sad state of affairs in many sub-Saharan Africa countries, where large segments of the society does not participate in electoral process. As a result of their voices being ignored from mainstream politics, there interests are not catered for in formulation of policies and the associated decision-making processes.

Some of the noticeable challenges facing marginalized and indigenous groups in electoral process include inability to access electoral centers (Htun & Ossa, 2013). This often cuts across gender, socio-economic status, age and geography. National Democratic Institute (2022) reveals that due to the youth's marginalization from mainstream political decision making, various segments they represent, such as economic statuses, religions, genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, among others, are disproportionately left out of the political participation since these portions of the populations cannot build consensus on the resolute political action. With these differing priorities, the political class easily finds their way in electoral processes and the eventual electoral outcome. It is against this backdrop that many elections in Africa are structurally opaque and do not emblem the identities and aspirations of the people whose will supreme against any established and unestablished conventions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is wealth of literature in the existing body of evidence on the interplay between political participation of the marginalized groups or the lack thereof and the associated electoral outcomes. Many researches point to the place and relevance of engaging all fragments of the

society in political participation. Of importance to note is the participation of the minority and vulnerable portions of the citizenry. A study done by Talton (2010) underlined the place of political consciousness in enabling the Konkomba and their neighbors in Northern Ghana to be included in political participation since national policies are determined at the ballot. Furthermore, the study noted the criticality of ethnicity, customs and traditions as some of the most predictors of political partaking in the Ghanaian society. The same sentiments were echoed by McEwan (2005) who stated that without involvement of the minority in South Africa, political processes do not necessarily reflect the aspirations of a nation-state.

Drawing evidence from a number of Africa countries, Pande (2003) found that many disadvantaged groups of the society are covertly and overtly left out of the political processes. As a consequence of their isolation, electoral outcomes are certainly undemocratic since the nationhood of a country has not been achieved. Due to the gender gap, Hern (2018) found that less women participate in politics compared to men, which in turn undermines the gender equality prospects and shared socio-economic and political development. This evidence was drawn from 31 African countries with specific emphasis on the Senegalese case study. Similarly, Gershon et al. (2019) contends that complexities of identity formation are closely intertwined with political participation and the associated attitudes and actions. Lupien (2018) states that participatory democracy is the ultimate panacea to reducing minority inequalities since opening of inclusive spaces integrates every segment of the society. Using evidence from 8 countries, Ahmed and Cho (2019) observe that public participation in electoral processes is one of the key enablers of democratic elections in Africa and beyond. This suggests that without incorporation of citizens' views, electoral processes are likely to biased and may not be a reflection of the identities and ambitions of the citizenry.

Much of the empirical studies in Africa appear to cast doubt on the goodwill of the political class in formulating policies that could reduce inequalities, particularly those faced by the marginalized groups. These sentiments are elucidated by Kenyatta (2022) who stated that without meaningful inputs from politicians, marginalized groups are unlikely to find their political spaces since they face the challenge of societal norms, gendered violence, financial capability, structure of political parties, among others. Violence against women in politics has been mooted among the key impediments to their political participation. This was particularly echoed by United Nations Women (2014) who revealed that women face violence during polls and this has time-to-time worked against the involvement of women in electoral process as observers, voters, or candidates where this has inadvertently or advertently excluded them from political decision-making.

Substantial scholarship has painted political parties as some of the greatest obstacles to inclusion of marginalized groups in electoral process. Due to their influence, most of the marginalized groups are excluded from political parties because of the perceived low influence and relevance they wield in party politics (Htun & Ossa, 2013). For instance, members from small communities are excluded from mainstream political activities (Booth, 2018). Furthermore, without proper party structures of inclusivity, minority groups are often seen as collateral than assets in Ethiopia (Yusuf, S. (2019). In Africa, Heads of State come from bigger communities, races, and ethnicities. Because of larger population, leading political parties are controlled by elites from leaders of the mentioned nations (Rothchild & Foley, 2019). As a consequence, individuals from minorities are time and again disenfranchised from participating in politics. Furthermore, marginalized groups frequently assume that their input is not relevant to the political. This has been a norm in many Africa countries, stretching from West to the East of Africa. For instance, dominant political parties in Uganda and Tanzania have been in power for over three decades (Collord, 2021). Due to their strength, some portions of the society do not participate in electoral processes.

Using evidence from experimental research and survey, Inman and Andrews (2009) states that though corruption has been one of the obstacles to political participation, marginalization of the minority groups has profound effect on the social change in Africa. This assertion was also mirrored in a study done by Isaksson (2014) who argues that political participation in Africa has been interpreted from a resource perspective, where those with better socio-economic status tend to participate in politics compared to those without the same. This was also interpreted from the societal norms that support such actions. In south Africa, Fialho (2022) states that black race is more engaged in politics compared to the white race. Importantly, the author noted that race is one of the key enablers of political mobilization. This points to the manifestation of politicized racial identities, where group members coming from similar collective identity are twice likely to engage in direct political action compared to those with socio-economic statuses. To that end, it appears that members of a group create a political identity that enables them to mold political spaces that serves their interests.

Political participation and engagement have been given wide scholarship from the purview of political context. Much of the literature points to the political interests and how the youths are used by the political elites to further their interests. Resnick and Casale (2011) states that though youths are likely not to be partisan; however, they are more disillusioned politically and twice likely to take part in political participation. Thus, it seems that youths are some of the marginalized groups that need to be integrated into the political spaces so that their voices are coopted in decision-making. Mac-Ikemenjima (2017) reveals that because of youth violence,

voter turnout remains low; however, the correlation between fear of violence and the youth voting was negative. Importantly, party affiliation, employment status and education did not significantly influence youth voting.

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL INCLUSIVITY THEORIES**

There are a number of theories that have provided insights on political participation in terms of what can be done to integrate marginalized groups into mainstream political processes, such as taking part in voting and seeking political offices. Much of the existing theoretical framework appear to dwell on the polarization of democracy particularly on 'us vs them'. As a result of this democratic polarization, McCoy and Somer (2019) found that societies are faced with pernicious polarization. Drawing from the pernicious polarization theory, literature reveals that various segments of the society distrust each other to the extent that societies are in constant and endemic disharmony. Munoz and Meguid (2021) adds that due to different or differing interests of political entrepreneurs, politicians pursue distinct political goals by leveraging polarization methods. One of the ways of achieving such an end is through using divisive voter mobilization strategies (McCoy & Somer, 2019). As a consequence, political elites are often at cross-roads because they routinely exploit polarizing strategies. To that end, polarization theory provides critical theoretical constructs that explain how marginalized groups are exploited by political elites and entrepreneurs in their attempt to seek power.

Social interactions are some of the defining features of political participation. Societal members with better ties are twice likely to participate in political processes while those with weak social networks may not meaningfully partake in political participation. This assertion is mirrored in the social network theory that proposes those with better social connections and interrelationships are twice likely to participate in democratic processes so as to express their voices (Eubank et al., 2021). Other individual attributes that are intertwined with political participation from the perspective of social networks include civic duty, political knowledge, religious attendance, education and political conviction (Campbell, 2013). These individual characteristics have a social dimension, suggesting that marginalized groups do not meaningfully benefit from social networks due to the ostracism they face and the inherent social exclusion from important networks. The social network theory proposes that marginalized groups can be integrated into political participation by unlocking their group level interactions through education and other important inputs, such as individual resources and group membership (McClurg, 2003). To bring forth minority and vulnerable groups into political participation, Ahmad et al. (2019) proposed the need for political efficacy so that marginalized groups are emancipated on the need for political participation. Through political efficacy,

electoral outcomes will be democratic since various portions of the population will be represented and their voices will be heard.

Social preference theory offers important insights on how societies can involve those who seem dejected and ostracized. The theory proposes the need for social preferences compared to individual payoffs so that societies can progress collectively (Chen et al., 2020). Buoyed with a collective approach, minority groups are easily integrated into mainstream political process, which in turn enhances inclusivity (Soon & Kluver, 2014). To supplement social preference theory, Opp (2019) proposed the application of rational choice theory to explain how rationality complements social preferences. According to the rational choice theory, individuals have a free will to make choice out of the alternatives. The net effect of the selected choices has profound bearing on aggregate social behavior. To connect rational choice theory to participation of marginalized groups in democratic processes, Geddes (2018) states that political actors pursue their interests in a rational manner, signifying that political elites and those in decision-making positions have the capability to incorporate the interests and issues of the marginalized groups into the core political processes. Marrying social preference and rational choice theories, it becomes apparent that political players wield the power to change the political discourse and direction for an egalitarian society. This will in turn enhance democratic process across political divides.

A number of theories have provided an in-depth analysis on the interplay between political participation and democracy. The key tenets of the theories in this particular theme are the inclusion of the marginalized groups so that their voices can be integrated in political processes and the associated decision-making/legislations. For instance, the theory of political participation proposed by Isa and Yucel (2020) underscores the centrality of participatory behavior as a key predictor of resource redistribution. Furthermore, the authors underlined the interconnectedness between participatory behavior and the inherent cumulative prospect theory and expected utility. Thus, integrating concerns of the marginalized groups is through altering the material domain of politics so that constituents of people feel part of the nation-state. Similarly, Teorell (2006) proposed three dimensions of political participation that are tied with democratic elections: subjective legitimacy, self-development, and equal protection of interests. In democracies, it is common that citizens are the key stakeholders who should be involved in the affairs of the state and the associated governance. Arguing along this line, Quick and Bryson (2016) reveals that political participation is a key approach in ensuring that various constituents of the population, particularly the marginalized groups are integrated into core political processes. Since governance involves formal and informal decision-making, minority

and vulnerable groups of the society ought to be incorporated in important governance issues that affects them.

## EMERGING ISSUES FROM LITERATURE

Wealth of literature on the interconnectedness between political participation and integration of marginalized groups into mainstream political process points to the place and relevance of political inclusivity as a panacea to democratic elections. Both empirical and theoretical literature underscores the criticality of involving the most vulnerable and minority groups in political processes. For instance, Virendrakumar et al. (2018) underscored the need to incorporate the interests of the people living with disabilities in electoral processes. It is by doing so that their concerns and interests will be incorporated in formal decision-making. Plethora of literature points to the relevance of social inclusion of marginalized groups so that societies progress in a collective manner. This assertion was pointed out by a study done by Chen et al., 2020) who proposed the centrality of bring in those left out of the social interactions with a view to ensuring that their interests are applied when making policies. Importantly, literature points to the necessities of onboarding those excluded from political processes because of their gender, age, religious inclination, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, among others (Campbel, 2013; McClurg, 2003; Oskooii, 2020). To that end, it appears that creation of egalitarian societies is a function of involving and engaging those that were previously left out of the core political processes.

Evidence points to the legal and political reforms that have pushed marginalized groups into peripheral positions. Because minority communities wield little political power, their interests are rarely coopted into critical decision-making. As a result, such groups are disenfranchised to the extent that they do not participate in electoral processes. This threatens tranquility of the democratic outplays. Importantly, literature indicates the challenges of realizing social inclusion in the political participation. Kenyatta (2022) underlines the most pertinent issues that affect political participation and how these threats to democracy continue to undermine democratic elections. Some of the germane stumbling blocks to political participation include societal norms, structure of political parties, violence to women in politics (gendered violence), among others. Political parties are some of the greatest impediments to political participation by marginalized groups (Shittu et al., 2022). Major political parties rarely involve marginalized groups in core political processes (Harkness, 2018). As a consequence of this exclusion, they are left out of the core political activities. This in turn discourages them from participating in politics, which threatens democratic elections in many parts of Africa. Without involvement of

the vulnerable and minority groups in political parties, they do not have opportunities of contesting for electoral positions (Bako & Syed, 2018).

Existing evidence underlines the role of culture in the marginalization of various segments of the society. Politics of identities stem from cultural predisposition of the people. The ways of life of a people often shape their political identities. For instance, patriarchal societies are less likely to involve women in core societal activities, such as voting and property rights (Akinola, 2018). This denies them social values, such as responsibility for self-determination, community, freedom, justice, among others. Exclusion of women from core political activities affects their participation to the extent that their voices are negated from decision-making (Adams et al., 2018). Even when granted voting rights, this inalienable right is usurped by their husbands, brothers, or a senior male figure in their lives (Krook & Sanín, 2020). Notably, violence against female politicians has been mooted in literature as one of the factors associated with undemocratic elections in Africa (Krook, 2020). Due to the violence and hooliganism meted on female politicians, most of them are discouraged from participating in politics, thus leading to undemocratic electoral outcomes (Moyo, 2020). This has ramifications on democratic elections. It is only by integrating issues of the downtrodden groups into political participation that elections will reflect the ideals, tenets, and principles of democracy.

The issue of youth participation emerges in literature. A number of studies point to the various ways in which marginalization of the young people affect various demographic constituents based on gender, education, religious affiliation, among others. Most of the African youth are left out democratic decision-making to the extent that they are disenfranchised to participate meaningfully in political processes (Saud et al., 2020). They are constrained in terms of resources, which reduces their chances of getting elected into political office where important national and quasi-national decisions are made (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019). Evidence shows that the average age of parliamentarians is 53 years old and 50 years old for the women. While the fifth of the world population constitutes of people of ages 15 and 25; However, only 1.65% of the parliamentarians are in their 20s, while 11.87 percent are in their 30s (Zaalishvili, 2019). This information places youths as important segments of the citizens who should be integrated into decision-making. Without their inputs, huge portions of the populations will be left out of the political processes. Literature affirms that by integrating youths into political processes, African countries ravaging from political conflict can benefit from young people who can be engaged in non-violent revolutions, peace building, and mobilizing societies to realize change (Lührmann, 2013). Importantly, the youth have the potential to build bridge across races and ethnicities, which is key in promoting peace and managing conflict.

The intertwined nature of preserving the rights of the marginalized minorities and political development is well elaborated in literature. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2010), issues of the marginalized people are by design negated from mainstream political processes, which has affected their participation in democratic processes, such as voting and being part of decision-making. Due to poverty and associated historical injustices, most of the indigenous communities in Africa have no say in decision-making due to various embargos that affects their involvement and engagement in political processes (Strauss, 2019). Furthermore, linguistic, ethnic, and religious minorities are poorly represented in decision-making bodies and political structures, which encumbers their ability to control decisions that affect them (Lendak-Kabok, 2019). Deprived of voice, marginalized minorities are twice likely to be left behind the development of societies (Fukuyama, 2018). This calls for holistic and sustained approaches in integrating their issues and interests for prosperity. Thus, there is need to promote and protect human rights of the minority people by ensuring that their issues are tackled at the policy level.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLITICAL INCLUSIVITY**

Existing scholarship shows that the concept of political inclusion has been studied widely and defined in many contexts. Despite this, however, there is consensus among scholars that this construct involves collective engagement of all segments of the community in the political processes, like provision of input across the spectrum of policy legislation and policy development through the constitutionally elected representatives, running for office, voting, and civic education (Ahlers, 2019; Lindahl, 2018). Taking part in all these processes remains a boulevard of ensuring that there is a sense of belonging and agency in the community (Mbah, Nwangwu, & Ugwu, 2019). International conventions alongside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as specific extensions of the international law have provided the recognition of the rights of the citizenry for public service access, participation in the electoral process, and being included in public affairs. The aforesaid rights form the building blocks of democracy and they applicable to people with various disabilities as demonstrated by the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Research evidence across different jurisdictions across the world espouses that democracies have been strengthened and sustained through political inclusion Siim & Mokre, 2018).

There is a strong linkage between robust democracies and inclusive political practices as these two often create societies characterized by law and order, peace, and stability (Munn, 2018). Availability of power in society increases as a country's democratic practice leans toward citizens' full participation as opposed to other democratic approaches and practices, considered

as zero sum, which come out as limited. Following the call to embrace an equal participatory democratic approach, political parties are increasingly becoming more representative as diversity while at the same time there has been institutionalization of diversity as witnessed through representatives in the legislature (Cleary, 2020). This, therefore, is a sharp pointer to the fact that democracies characterized by political inclusivity are able to harness the benefits that stem out of a diversified group of representatives who exercise legislative or executive power on behalf of the citizens (Mendes, 2019). Many nations across the world have already crafted constitutions that explicitly provide for the role and place of the minority and marginalized groups. For instance, the Kenyan constitution spells that the minorities and marginalized groups can benefit from a wide range of affirmative action programmes, participation and representation in governance being one of them.

Besides political inclusion, the inclusive societies approach is another perspective that has shed more light into the theme of inclusivity where it has been evidenced that inclusive growth approaches on addressing inequality and reducing poverty among groups previously excluded has greater prospects for increasing access to business opportunities, employment, and education (Pouw & Gupta, 2017). Moreover, mounting evidence evinces that economic growth is one of the direct outcomes that result from gender equality, and this relationship contributes to agricultural labour and human capital productivity, including a positive impact on growth at the macro level (Beckwith, 2021). As development takes place, it is important that services be extended to all as this has been linked to economic growth. In this regard, issues surrounding income poverty can partially be tackled by means of participatory development projects.

Political inclusion promotes state-building, peace, and social cohesion. Peaceful societies worldwide have been realized and fostered through broader political processes and inclusive political settlements (Mendes, 2019). Extant research indicates that there is a positive association between inclusive states and peaceful societies (Htun & Ossa, 2013). Legitimacy as opposed to coercion is an important antecedent for state-society relations while inter-group cohesion and trust have their foundation on greater associational life. Whilst a growing wave of literature shows that inclusive political representation and participation are important for democracy, they have largely remained a challenge in the contemporary society given that democracies are unable to offer opportunities equally for the purpose of enhancing inclusivity across the political spectrum of representation and participation (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2013). A select elites or groups dominating the available political institutions in new democracies means that a higher number of citizens have lost trust in them. Towards this end, it is clear that as societies benefit from political inclusion, minorities and

marginalized groups are still grappling with unequal opportunities both in the representation and participation in democratic processes and institution to advance their interests. In effect, finding solutions to problems, such as minority exclusion and gender imbalance, is a matter of urgency for citizens, national governments, and international organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The criticality of integrating issues, human rights, and interests of the marginalized groups into mainstream political participation has been demonstrated theoretically and empirically. Appreciating the identities and cultures of the minority and vulnerable portions of the population will go a long way in circumventing encumbrances to their political participation. It has been demonstrated in this paper that marginalized minorities in the society should be treated with human dignity by ensuring that their voices are incorporated in democratic processes, such as in electoral cycles. Negating and ostracizing minority groups will delay political and socio-economic development of countries. Without a nation-state, countries will struggle to achieve economic growth and development, which heavily rely on the political angle of decision-making. It's important to appreciate the indispensable role that marginalized groups can play in political processes. As Africa moves closer to democratic elections, it is critical for the political class to incorporate affirmative action policies so that the political interests of the minority and vulnerable members of the society are holistically detailed in policy interventions.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The paper relied on a systematic review of literature, signifying that it lacks an empirical approach. Thus, there is need for an empirical study that links political participation and inclusion marginalized groups as a panacea to democratic elections in Africa. Similarly, there is need for further studies beyond Africa that incorporates political participation of the excluded sections of the society as an answer to economic growth.

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