



## EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT AND THE DESIRE TO MIGRATE ABROAD AMONG THE YOUTH IN RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Migration has become a prevalent phenomenon worldwide, driven by various factors such as economic opportunities, education, and social aspirations. In the context of River State, Nigeria, this research paper explores the intricate relationship between political disillusionment and the desire of youth to migrate abroad. Five hundred and twenty-eight youths (n=528) were conveniently selected from different locations in the River States as the respondents. Data for the survey was collected using a self-report measure assessing political distrust and intention to migrate. Linear regression analysis was conducted on the data, and the result showed that political distrust statistically significantly predicted illegal migration among the youth in River State. The study concludes that political distrust significantly contributes to youth's irregular emigration in River State.

**Keywords:** Political distrust, illegal migration, youth, River state.

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### Introduction

Migration, which refers to the movement of people from one economy to another (WorldBank, 2009), has become a theme that occupies the centrality of contemporary international debates (Santos & Brasil, 2020). Over the years, there has been growing concern about people entering countries other than theirs without proper documentation. Migration from the developing world to other parts of the world raises many important political, economic, and humanitarian topics (Mbaye, 2014). Illegal migration, also considered undocumented, irregular, and unauthorized migration (Donato & Massey, 2016), is an umbrella term encompassing a complex set of conditions and embraces various patterns of transnational mobilities. However, there is no universally accepted definition of illegal migration. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) described illegal migration as a movement that takes place outside the governing norms of the sending, transit, and receiving country" (IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, 2017). The trend is a global topic (Perkowska, 2016) and has attracted massive 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 & Wahba, 2021; Solovyev & Urda, 2020; Vlasova, 2019).

For many decades, the world has regularly witnessed tragic events related to the illegal migration of people from Africa into Europe and America. The increasing media coverage of people arriving on European coasts proves how strongly most people are willing to exit their country at any cost with the expectation of finding a better life. However, while the colossal rate of illegal migrants from Africa arrive in European countries regularly and a large number of them perish in transit, literature on illegal migration is mainly focused on the situation of Mexico and the United States (Gathmann, 2008; Hanson, 2006; Hartman, 2011; Reichert & Massey, 2014; Román González & Zúñiga, 2014). However, there is limited literature examining illegal migration from Africa to Europe. In particular, illegal migration seems challenging to track because it transpires outside the regulatory rules of countries and is typically aimed at evading detection. However, while the trend of migrants arriving in a host country without proper documentation is not new (de Haas, 2008), there have been new approaches to illegal migration that seem to overstep restrictive immigration policies and border controls. Initially, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa used the Maghreb route via the desert to reach their prospective European destinations. However, the intensified border policies and increasing organized crimes have instigated the massive boat pattern of migration from the African continents. Also, many migrants gain access to Europe using fake documents, mostly in connivance with officials.

The increasing wave of migrants heading to Europe and other continents to escape Africa's social, economic, and political challenges reflects a massive challenge for the receiving countries as they struggle to control the influx of undocumented travelers. The Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (2017) reported that about 7000 illegal migrants were either dead or missing. More than half of the crisis was recorded along the Mediterranean, with most victims originating from Africa. While unlawful migrants are more exposed to increased health deterioration,



hopelessness, substantial financial loss, and starvation, the social, economic, and security burden inflicted on the host countries has led to the adoption of extraordinary measures to cope with the migrant influx (Arenas-Hidalgo, 2016). Regardless, many young people constantly plan to migrate to other countries through the back channels. The dangers associated with illegal migration have been widely discussed in the literature (Amenta et al., 2021; Arenas-Hidalgo, 2016; Kassar & Dourgnon, 2014; Krcmery & Kulkova, 2014; Mannik, 2016; Pavlidis et al., 2018; Pinchi et al., 2017; Setrana, 2021; Tefera, 2019; Yahaya, 2020).

The motivation for survival and the urge to seek better living has continued to force many African youths to engage in a vast, risky adventure to cross Europe and other parts of the world. This motive to escape poverty, hunger, unemployment, and insecurity, including the quest to compete with others and reach a certain level, has contributed to people migrating to developed countries. Young Nigerians are at the top of the population list with the intention of migrants from Africa going to developed countries. Most illegal migration in Nigeria occurs among youth aged 18 to 35. Individuals within this age population are primarily single. They have the strength to withstand the turbulence of irregular migration compared to older people, who are more likely to be married, with more commitments and less energy to withstand the rigors of migration (Ikuteyijo, 2012). In particular, most of the migrants involved in the Mediterranean Sea disaster in 2016 were mainly from Nigeria (Nwalutu, 2016). These individuals, usually in their youth age, engage in risky voyages across the globe despite the increasing mortality and morbidities relative to undocumented journeys across borders. Hence, understanding the underlying motive for embarking on an undocumented trip remains essential in controlling the tide.

Several factors, including economic issues, unemployment, personal ambitions, insecurities, inadequate basic amenities for survival, degradation of the environment, and social situations, have substantially instigated and motivated many Nigerian youth to move to different parts of the world. In addition, the trend in illegal migration among young people can be attributed to job recruitments by foreign agents, the prospects for better education, increasing earning power and cultivating enhanced living conditions through access to improved economic setup and advanced infrastructural framework lacking in Nigeria. Although the trend cut across the regions in Nigeria, the present study is focused on the young individual in the River state and their quest to migrate abroad.

Intimations suggest that nearly one in ten households in River State has one of its members abroad or has attempted to migrate. Although, a large number travel through the standard visa corridor. Those who could not meet the visa requirements choose to fake travel documents or take a risky route to a foreign country, traveling across the Saharan desert to the Mediterranean Sea despite the risks associated with this route. Furthermore, young youth living in River State experience high levels of monetary intimidation by the haves, physical and material jamborees that constantly motivate the younger ones to escape the country. However, there are indications that the government's inability to fulfill political promises, provide basic amenities, and attend to the needs of the people, as witnessed in every society, exacerbates migration. The present study examined political distrust as a factor that could explain the variations in youth intention to emigrate at all costs.

Political disillusionment erodes trust and confidence in political institutions and processes. It often arises from experiences of corruption, ineffective governance, and unfulfilled expectations. Previous research highlights the impact of disillusionment on civic participation, social cohesion, and individual well-being. When young individuals perceive political processes as corrupt, inefficient, or unresponsive, they may become disenchanted and lose hope for their country's future. Disillusionment can lead to frustration, hopelessness, and a belief that change is unlikely within the existing system. The desire to migrate abroad among youth is influenced by several factors: Seeking better job prospects, higher wages, and improved living standards, aspiring for quality education and exposure to diverse experiences, escaping political instability, violence, or discrimination. Young people are more likely to view migration as an opportunity to escape disillusionment and seek a brighter future elsewhere.

The modern migration pattern of Nigeria to various destinations represents a response to economic and political circumstances. It is also known that most migrants are young people, as this has implications for them being most likely to be drawn into the political struggles of their countries. They are eager to change the system that has brought them economic failure and political oppression. The decision to migrate usually comes to an individual after comparing the living circumstances in their home and potential destination countries. This 'relative deprivation' is visible in Nigeria, where increasing poverty levels have led educated youth to condemn the failures of their parents' generation to build a functional Nigeria. Results of interviews conducted both in the Niger Delta and Delta State show how, particularly among tertiary educated youth, there is an intense desire for escape from the current set of circumstances. A widely held belief that no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to achieve



the desired standard of living in Nigeria is coupled with skepticism about the possibilities for national change. An aspect of political disillusionment is the belief that the state does not fulfill its "end of the bargain" with citizens and thus has no legitimate claim to their loyalty. Indeed, previous studies have linked political distrust to non-compliance to government policies (Banaji, 2008; Ezeibe et al., 2020). Frustration with the political economy of Nigeria is reflected in the desire of Nigerian youth to acquire income and accumulate capital by any means possible, often with the intention of migrating. The primary purpose of the present study is to examine political disillusionment as a previously unexplored variable that could predict the desire to migrate abroad among youth in River State.

**Hypothesis:** *Political disillusionment would significantly predict the desire to migrate abroad.*

## Method

### Participants

The target population for the present study was young people between 18 and 35 years old residing in River State. The rationale for targeting this cohort is that the objective of the survey primarily emphasized youth migration. The participants were approached in different communities in River State, Nigeria, between April and August 2023. In particular, they were briefed on the study's purpose and were equally informed that the survey was voluntary and that they could withdraw anytime they wanted. Five hundred and forty-six youth consented to participate in the study. Thus, those who completed the consent form were given the study's instrument to fill on the spot. They were urged to seek clarification on any perceived ambiguity. In all, five hundred and twenty-eight (528) copies of the questionnaire were appropriately filled and utilized for statistical analysis, while the remaining eighteen (18) copies were discarded for improper filling.

### Measures

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire items were developed from relevant literature and designed to assess political distrust, the overall perception of government behavior, and the intention to migrate on a five-point Likert-type scale. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: A and B. Part A measures cognitive, affective, and behavioral assessment of the political system. Part B includes questions about the intention to migrate. Thus, the measure was subjective, and respondents had to self-report their conception of the variables. However, a Cronbach Alpha 0.79 coefficient was recorded for the scale following a pilot study using participants outside the study population.

## Result

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 23). A simple linear regression was performed on the data. The result indicated that political distrust statistically significantly predicted illegal migration at  $\beta = .912$ ,  $p < .05$ , with  $R^2$  of .314. Thus, the adjusted square showed that political distrust explained about 31.4% of the variation in illegal youth migration.

**Table 1** shows the simple linear regression.

|                           | B    | Std. Error | Beta | t     | Sig. |
|---------------------------|------|------------|------|-------|------|
| (Constant)                | 1.77 | .076       |      | 23.31 | .000 |
| Political disillusionment | .912 | .032       | .912 | 26.05 | .000 |
| $R^2$                     | 314  |            |      |       |      |

## Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to determine the variation in the desire to migrate abroad among the youth in River State based on political disillusionment. The simple linear regression result found that political disillusionment statistically significantly predicted the desire to migrate abroad at  $\beta = .912$ ,  $p < .05$ . political distrust accounted for 31.4% of the variance in youth's unlawful migration of River State. Accordingly, the result supported the study's expectation that political disillusionment would predict the desire 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 potential for emigration. Equally, the finding indicates that those who intend to migrate but cannot legally process their papers would resort to an illegal journey. Indeed, the government's failure 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 presupposes that political disillusionment as a psychosocial variable reflects a significant determinant of the willingness to relocate. Thus, the intention to migrate illegally combines behavioral adaptations elicited by evaluating and perceiving the political landscape. The trend has severe implications for the mental and overall well-being of the youths.

### Conclusion

The study examined how political disenchantment relates to illegal migration among young people in River State. A regression study showed that political distrust predicts young people's irregular relocation to foreign nations. Furthermore, the outcome suggests that having political trust can lead to developing a mindset related to emigration. This discovery has consequences for both research and immigration policies. The study continues despite facing difficulties, such as the criticism of self-report measures for common variance issues. Future studies should utilize several methods for data gathering to reduce biased reporting. The sampling process presents a barrier to generalization. A more extensive sampling method is needed to get a conclusion that can be applied to a broader population. The study added to the existing literature by showing that political distrust has a role in influencing young people's decision to move illegally. Enhancing political performance is a well-established method for reducing political skepticism. Regrettably, it is not practical in today's society. To reverse distrust stemming from perceived uneven practices and unfair consequences, policymakers and politicians should encourage shared beliefs in equality and fairness. They should also strengthen monitoring procedures to prevent morally questionable behavior contributing to youth's skepticism of the system. Additional study is required to further our understanding of other mediating factors in the connections between political distrust and irregular migration.

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