GERONTOCRACY IN AFRICAN POLITICS
Youth and the Quest for Political Participation

Joseph Olusegun Adebayo

Joseph Adebayo is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

By the late 1950s and early 1960s most African colonies had attained independence from British and French rule, resulting in great optimism regarding the future of the nascent democracies on the continent. A buoyant populace transformed their memories of harsh political struggles into images of heroism and confirmed the victory of the national movement for liberation. There was hope that these new nations would soon steer their own ships of state and conduct free, fair and regular elections that would be true reflections of the wishes of the majority of the population. Sadly, what transpired afterwards was (and still is) far from what had been expected. Civil unrest and anarchy soon reigned in most African countries as the so-called 'founding fathers' considered themselves above the law. In a bid to retain power, they initiated a system of electoral manipulation and violence that continues to pervade the continent. More worrisome was the birth of a culture that excluded Africa's youth from active participation in politics; this resulted in the retention of old politicians, evident in a leadership occupied mostly by septuagenarians and octogenarians. This study examines gerontocracy in Africa and its impact on the political participation of Africa's youth.

Keywords: Africa, elections, electoral violence, nationhood, nationalism, youth

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2017, France elected the 39-year-old Emmanuel Jean-Michel Frédéric Macron as its president, displacing Napoleon as the youngest president in French history (Leicester 2017). This election created huge excitement across the globe. For those empathetic to the plight of migrants, the emergence of centrist Macron, as opposed to far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, provided hope that France would continue to provide succour to legitimate asylum seekers, albeit with improved security and background checks.

Macron's victory at the polls set a fresh agenda for public debate in Africa. While global leaders sent congratulatory messages to the newly elected president, the question of youth involvement in mainstream politics moved to the front burner of public discourse. Some salient questions became pertinent: When would Africa have its own youthful leader like Macron? Why has it been near impossible for a generational change of guard in most African countries, from the old to the young? What must African youths do to initiate change and produce a Macron-like leader? These questions are germane when one considers that Macron was an infant when some of Africa's longest-serving leaders assumed power in their respective countries. He was barely two years old when Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasongo of Equatorial Guinea assumed power close to four decades ago, and the same age when Jose Eduardo dos Santos assumed office as president of Angola in the late 1970s; he was three years old when Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe became president and was barely five when Cameroon's Paul Biya became president.

Recent elections on the continent do not offer much hope of a generational shift. President Muhammadu Buhari was elected as Nigeria's president in 2015 at the age of 73; Ghana's president Nana Akufo-Addo was also 73 years old at the time of his election in 2017; Malawi's president, Peter Mutharika was elected in 2014 aged 74; South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma was re-elected for a second term in 2014 aged 70. Suffice to add that there have been attempts by younger men to vie for political office across the continent but with little or no success. For example, in the 2014 general elections in South Africa, expelled former youth leader of the African National Congress (ANC) Julius Malema, then aged 33, led the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to third position in the overall election result, winning 25 seats in Parliament and 1 169 259 popular votes. While many hailed his young party's debut performance at the polls as a positive indication of a possible generational shift in political leadership, others argued that the EFF had won a sizeable percentage of the popular votes because it played on the frustrations of the impoverished population (particularly blacks) who hankered after the possibility of land ownership and socioeconomic equality. Fakir (2014) described the EFF's victory thus:

> While the party appeared to be radical in its approach, it is essentially an empty rhetoric captured in the politics of spectacle, where even complex ideas get pared down to mere slogans. The party's strategies of 'nationalising the commanding heights of the economy (mines, banks and large factories to the rest of us), expropriating and redistributing land seized by "white thieves" in a process of grand theft, without

> compensation, and distributing unused state land' were, ironically, part of the policy arsenal of the apartheid era National Party.

Although Fakir and other scholars discounted the EFF's nominal success as unsustainable, the fact that the party was led by a young man, and the unexpected number of votes it accrued, gave rise to renewed optimism of the possibility of a youth renaissance, not only in South Africa but across the continent. Even more encouraging was the election of Mmusi Aloysias Maimane as the leader of South Africa's largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), on 10 May 2015, and his position as leader of the opposition in the National Assembly since 29 May 2014. Even more significant was the fact that his predecessor in the National Assembly was a young woman, Lindiwe Mazibuko, who was elected DA parliamentary leader in 2011 at the age of 31. Both Malema and Maimane were born in the early 1980s and their active political participation anticipates the possibility of more African youth participation in politics, especially in vying for elective positions. They are nonetheless exceptions to and not the norm across the continent. In contrast, the norm in Africa seems to be a growing youth population and a diminishing but powerful aged cohort that has tenaciously held on to power.

The central argument of this article is that, for many reasons, Africa's youth has not shared in post-colonial governance. These range from political apathy and passivity on the part of the youth, to governments that are skewed to prevent new entrants into mainstream structures and a culture that silences the young. The article examines the role played by the founding fathers of Africa's independence and their political understudies (godfathers) in the emergence of a generation of acquiescent youths. These young people are frequently used to perpetrate violence before, during and after elections, rather than participating in any real political decision-making and governance.

METHODOLOGY

The study involves content and textual analysis of secondary data regarding the political involvement of the youth in Africa. The findings result from a study conducted in South Africa and it would be imprudent to extrapolate these to experiences in the rest of the African continent. Also, it is important to state that the study involved selected students of the University of Cape Town; thus, the findings and/or biographical data in no way reflect the larger South African youth population. Firstly, student dynamics and even racial composition would differ significantly, depending on the province, age and ranking of the institution. Given the sociocultural and sociopolitical similarities between African countries, particularly those in the sub-Saharan region, the result of this study can however

serve as template or guide to understanding the broader dynamics of Africa's youth involvement in politics.

Interviews were conducted with 200 students at the University of Cape Town on their views of the political participation of young people in Africa's political milieu. Stratified probability sampling technique was adopted because of the researcher's intent to capture samples with a demographic profile that included a similar number of subgroups (women, men, black people, whites, coloureds, Indians, undergraduate and postgraduate). This goes a long way to increasing credibility and fostering inclusivity. Using this design, the researcher ensured that there was some form of racial and gender balance, given the sensitive nature of race discourse in South Africa. The breakdown of the participating students is presented in Figure 1 below:
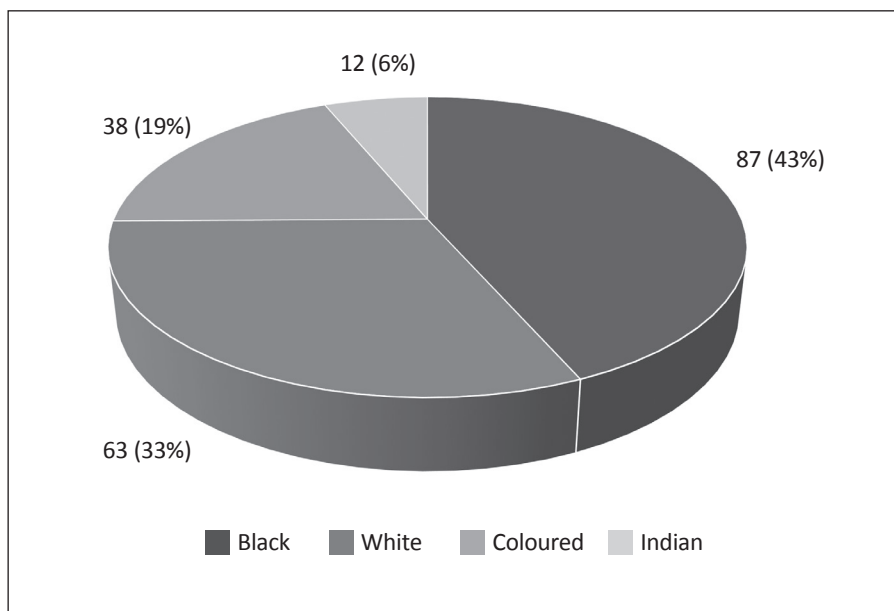

Figure 1
Racial distribution of participating students

As can be gleaned from Figure 1 above, 87 students (or 43%) of the respondents were black, 63 students (or 32%) were white, 38 students (or 19%) were coloured, while 12 students (or 6%) were Indian. Also, 102 (or 51%) of the sampled students were females, 91 (45.5%) were males, while 7 students (or 3.5%) of the students ticked 'other' as their gender. In addition, 133 of the students were undergraduates, while 67 were postgraduate students.

Rethinking the Labour of our Heroes Past

'It is far better to be free to govern or misgovern yourself
than to be governed by anybody else.'

Kwame Nkrumah

From the 1950s through to the 1970s, decolonisation swept across Africa with attendant hope and anticipation from enthusiastic citizens. While freedom was greeted with euphoria in many places, it could not mask the deep political uncertainties. These uncertainties often accompanied independence in nations with ethno-religious diversity which had been merged into single countries by colonialists for the sake of administrative convenience. Thus, it was not long after independence that former freedom fighters and symbols of liberation metamorphosed into self-styled demagogues and unrestrained kleptomaniacs who pilfered their nations' treasuries and whipped up ethno-religious sentiments in order to retain power.

Africa's struggles against colonialism are well-documented; equally well known are the roles played by the continent's founding fathers in the struggle for sociopolitical emancipation. Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kenneth Kaunda, Shirley Graham Dubois, Ramatu Baba, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Robert Mugabe and Patrice Lumumba are names that still evoke deep emotional reactions from citizens in their respective countries – and indeed the entire continent. So highly revered were and are these leaders that long after their deaths, tales of their heroism still reverberate across the continent. Praise poems were included in the national anthems of these new nations as reminders of their sacrifices and the need for their memories to be eternally revered and preserved. For example, a line in the first stanza of the national anthem of Nigeria admonished the citizens to ensure that: '… the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain' while a line in the Zimbabwe's anthem overtly proclaims the heroics of the liberation fighters by stating clearly: 'we praise our heroes' sacrifice…'

While some of these died with their heroic status and public image intact, history may remember others differently. Shortly after independence, signs of existing ethno-religious fault lines started to emerge as inter-tribal wars, and coups d'état and full-blown civil wars tore apart the new republics. From building a semblance of national consciousness – which aided the ousting of the colonialists – the focus shifted to regaining some sort of new identity within clans and ethnic groups, thereby creating a confused form of national consciousness. Fanon (1967, p. 118) gives a succinct description of that sentiment:

> National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystal-
> lisation of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the
> immediate and most obvious result of the mobilisation of the people,
> will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of
> what it might have been. The faults that we find in it are quite sufficient
> explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young and
> independent nations, the nation is passed over for the race, and the
> tribe is preferred to the state.

Calderisi (2007, p. 61) argues that the unrepressed veneration accorded to the
nationalists by the populace transformed most of them into vain and conceited
demagogues. No sooner had their nations gained independence than they
implemented forms of subjugation reminiscent of colonialism, employing much of
that repressive legislation and practice. Shortly after Ghana attained independence
Kwame Nkrumah was quoted as saying the following:

> The ideological development here is not very high. There are but two
> or three of us who know what we are doing…. I do not want to make
> too much of myself, but in a way, this nation is my creation; if I should
> die, there would be chaos.
>
> <div align="right">Calderisi 2007, p. 61</div>

Once independence was achieved, these founding fathers became aware of their
ethnic affiliations and both demonised and subtly conspired against the other
ethnic groups. In Nigeria, for example, frontline nationalists like Sir Ahmadu Bello
and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) had diverse views on the structure of post-colonial
Nigeria. According to Adebanwi (2007, p. 22), while Zik favoured a more centrist
political architecture, Bello favoured a looser federation which guaranteed the
preservation of the dominant Islamic religious culture of the northern region.
Bello had this to say to Zik: 'No, let us (first) understand our differences; I am a
Muslim and a Northerner. You are a Christian and an Easterner. By understanding
our differences, we can build unity in our country'.

What Sir Ahmadu Bello proposed was the need for the various units that
made up the amalgamated Nigeria to understand their place and significance in
the nation as individuals and groups before any attempt to forge a unified country
could be successful. With the benefit of hindsight, the quagmire the country
currently finds itself in regarding the national question would have been avoided
if the nationalists had paid attention to Bello's admonition. Failure to heed his

warning led to the emergence of a divided country at the time of independence. The scenario was in many ways similar to other countries on the continent that attained independence at much the same time.

Thus, when the time came for elections in the newly independent nations, tempers ran high and the stage was set for carnage. It did not take long before the First Republic in Nigeria crumbled. Shortly after the country attained independence, the nationalists disregarded calls for free and fair competition for elective power. Instead they retreated to their regional enclaves and transformed their political parties into tools for regional identity. The 1964 elections predictably uncovered hidden suspicion and animosity between the major ethnic groups in the country and the result was wanton loss of lives and property.

Possibly one of the saddest fallouts of the election crisis of 1964 was the involvement of the youth in the ensuing violence, because the protests were mostly student-led. According to Anifowoshe (1982), student-led protests degenerated before long into violent exercises with attendant inter-communal conflicts that claimed more than 200 lives. Diamond (1988) recalls that students of universities in Southern Nigeria, concerned that the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was manipulating the electoral process, called for a three-month army take-over to organise the elections as they had no confidence in the electoral process put in place by the then Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The students became tools in the hands of politicians and barricaded roads in order to inflict mayhem on perceived opponents. According to Umar, Ali and Siedelson (2015), the 1964 elections in Nigeria marked the unfortunate beginning of youth involvement in political violence. They aver that rather than build youth capacity to take part in the electoral process by putting themselves forward for elective positions, politicians used them as tools to disrupt political organisation in the nascent democracies emerging across the continent.

Government of the Old, by the Young and for the Old

There is no generally accepted definition of the term youth because of its fluidity as a category describing a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Globally, age has generally been used as the best possible means of defining the group. For example, the United Nations defines youth thus: '…the United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as a youth without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States' (Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly, A/40/256, 1985).

Several UN entities, instruments and regional organisations have different definitions of youth, which the United Nations secretariat recognises, as summarised below in Table 1.

Table 1
Definitions of youth according to various UN entities

Entity/Instrument/Organisation	Age	Reference
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24	UN Instruments, Statistics
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth 15-32	Agenda 21
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: Youth: 15-24	UNFPA
UNICEF /The Convention on Rights of the Child	Child until 18	UNICEF
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15-35	The African Union, 2006

Source: www.un.org/esa

Olaiya (2014) is of the opinion that the term youth has both cultural and political implications in Africa and that a generic definition would not capture the dynamics of the youth question on the continent. He makes a distinction between 'modern-civic' and 'traditional-primordial' notions of youth and avers that it often gives rise to the social and cultural tensions that characterise many African nations. According to Olaiya, Africa's adverse economic conditions mean that a sizeable proportion of its youth population is unable to meet socially ascribed responsibilities even when they have become adults, according to their chronological age (e.g. 40 years and above). Thus, the youth phase in the continent is often extended due to the harsh and lingering socioeconomic conditions in many countries.

Whatever definition of youth in Africa is preferred, the fact remains that the continent, which has the world's largest youth population, has been run predominantly as a gerontocracy. According to Mills, Davies, Obasanjo and Herbst (2017, p. 7), Africa's population is growing at an alarming rate with an attendant growth in the number of young people, and this trend is not expected to slow down in the foreseeable future. The populations of 28 countries on the continent are projected to double by 2050. Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia are expected to have their populations increase at least fivefold. Not only will the anticipated population explosion have a socioeconomic impact, it is also expected to have sociopolitical significance as the continent will probably consist mostly of youths below the age of 25. When compared to the rest of the world's demographic decline, Africa's population growth means that it will be increasingly differentiated by the age of its population. Mills et al. (2007, p. 8) project that Africans will make up a larger share of the world's young people as it would account for 48% of those aged 14 and under.
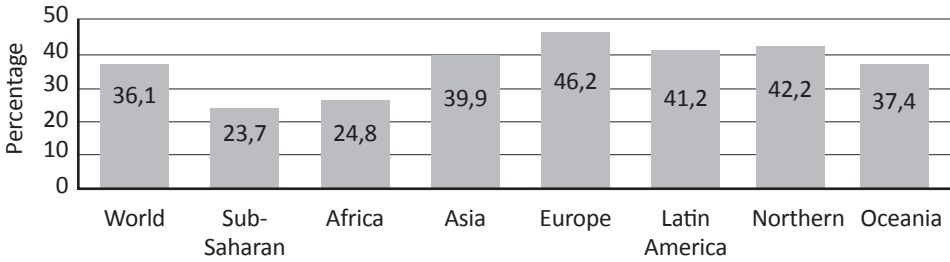
Source: Mills et al. (2017, p. 9)

Figure 2: Projected median age of world's population by 2050

Africa's rapidly growing population has drastically transformed the number of eligible voters with the introduction of a significant proportion of young voters in recent elections. The largest age cohort is the one born in the mid- to late-1980s who reached their twenties at the time of the 2014 general elections in some countries. For example, estimates from Statistics South Africa show that there are now 11.8 million eligible voters between 18 and 29 years, who constitute 35% of the voting population. The percentage of eligible youth voters is even higher in Ghana where youths make up 58% of the country's voting population (UN Youth, 2010). At the time of the Ghanaian general elections of 2016, eligible youth voters made up 65% of the entire voting population. What these figures show is that most of Africa's old leaders have been voted into power by young voters. According to Chirimumimba (2017), while the average median age of the African population was 20 in 2016, the average age for heads of state was 66, making Africa a continent of the young led by the old.

Source: http://venturesafrica.com

Figure 3
Africa's median age in relation to President/PM's age

As can be seen from Figure 3 above, there is a sizeable gap between Africa's average median ages and the ages of the continent's presidents and prime ministers. The reasons for the perceived apathy amongst Africa's youth, as well as the age disparity in leadership positions, are multifaceted. One of the major explanations adduced for this is a subservient culture that maintains the infallibility of elders. According to Adeleke (2017, p. 6), in some African cultures elders are never considered to be wrong even when they palpably are so; and young people may never evince more knowledge than their elders, even when they do. He further remarked thus:

> The elder can say whatever he wants to the youth, he can be rude to the youth, he can disrespect him and talk down on him, even when he (the elder) is at fault, and the youth must take it because he is the youth. This is often reflected at grassroots levels where, in villages and wards, elders hold all the key positions. There is even a saying in a Nigerian tribe that "when elders are talking, the youth must be quiet." When you take this idea and magnify it, you start to see how the culture is already rigged to make elders think that youth have nothing beyond physical strength and youthful exuberance to offer when they (the elders) are around. The few times young people are allowed to lead are times when they are leading their peers, as seen in student unions and community age groups.
>
> Adeleke 2017, p. 6

Adeleke further believes these cultural barriers are wittingly or unwittingly experienced within the political terrain, resulting in a burgeoning population of youth without political pedigree. Given the complex nature and cost of electioneering in Africa, it becomes very daunting for the youth with a culturally and economically repressed mindset to break into political leadership. To be elected into political office in Africa requires political connections that are usually built over decades and across several ethno-religious divides. Unfortunately, Africa's youth do not appear to possess the sort of political influence and connections that have defined the outcomes of elections on the continent. The peculiar socioeconomic realities of the continent mean that the youth stage often stretches to mid-thirties and early forties, leaving little or no time for the network building required for political success.

This practice of excessive respect for elders is uniform throughout Africa. Sesanti (2010, p. 347) argues that across the length and breadth of the continent, respect is a key part of national culture; difference lies in the degree to which

actions are regarded as respectful or disrespectful. He further posits that this has unfortunately led to the abuse of authority by elders on the continent. Citing the example of so-called respect in the profession of journalism, he contends that ethics has been relegated to the background. This is because of the fear of being labelled disrespectful for exposing the ills of national leaders even when they are proved to have been in the wrong. Okigbo (1994, p. 17) contends that such unnecessary respect within the field of journalism has dire consequences, not just to the profession, but to society at large because the journalistic tenet of social responsibility is sacrificed to that of veneration.

Cultural barriers aside, there is also the challenge posed by money. Shulika, Muna and Mutula (2013) studied the impact money had on the electoral process in Kenya and concluded that money was a major deciding factor in electoral success. Electoral outcomes, especially in the context of African democracies, have frequently been influenced by the wealth of the candidate(s) or their parties. This is not a new phenomenon, given that rulers and contenders for public office have throughout history leveraged power through the wealth they own or control. Equally, the economic strength of their political base gives them an edge over rivals, competitors, and detractors. The modern political landscape is replete with political systems in which rulers and governing bodies across continents – monarchs, military dictators, elected heads of state, and legislatures – rely on their economic and financial influence, whether ill-gotten or legitimately accumulated, to gain access to and/or maintain political power (Shulika, Muna & Mutula, 2014).

An African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), updated in 2010, indicates the enormous amounts of money spent by African nations to conduct elections on the continent (see Table 2 below). Although the cost of elections in Africa has almost tripled in the sampled countries (for example the 2017 elections in Kenya is estimated to have cost $1 billion), it nonetheless proves the decisive impact that money, or lack of it, can have in the outcome of elections.

Table 2
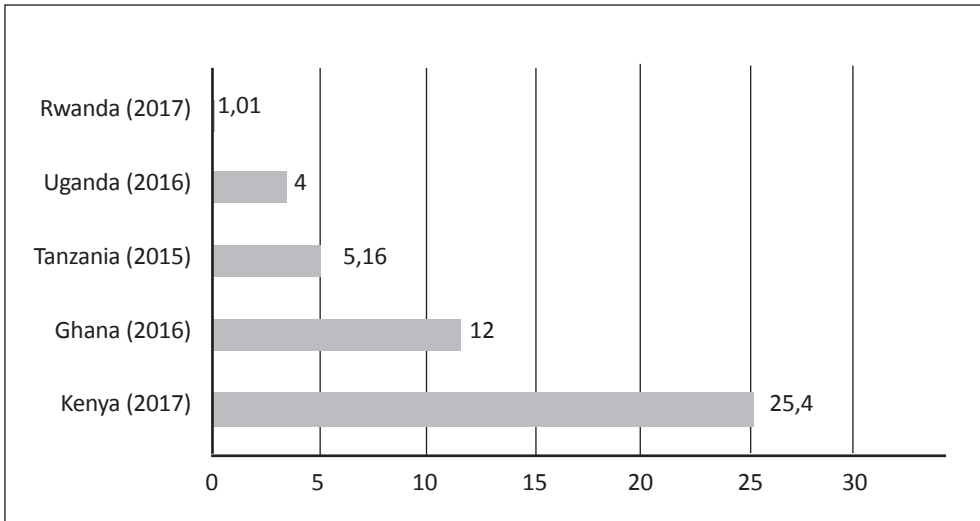**Cost of elections in selected African countries (in US dollars)**

Country	Election	Total cost	Per voter
Angola	1992	US$100 million	US$22
Botswana	2006	US$500 million	US$27.9
	1994	US$1 million	US$2.7
DRC	2005	US$546 million	US$2.5

Lesotho	2002	US$13.5 million	US$15
	1998	US$6 million	US$6.9
Malawi	1994	US$8 million	US$2.1
Mauritius	2005	US$10.0 million	US$ 11.0
	1995	US$3.8 million	US$ 5.6
Mozambique	2004	US$21.5 million	US$6.46
	1994	US$64.5 million	US$10.2
Namibia	1999	US$0.98-1.15 million	US$1.8-2.2
	1994	US$1.46 million	US$3
Seychelles	1998	US$276 626	US$5.8
South Africa	2004	US$122 million	US$7.8
	1999	US$117 million	US$7.3
	1994	US$265 million	US$13.5
Tanzania	2000	US$49.6 million	US$7.66
	1995	US$38 million	US$7.88

Source: https://www.eisa.org.za/wep/comcosts.htm

Table 2 above and Figure 4 below indicate how African countries spent millions of dollars conducting elections, sometimes in periods of biting economic recession. Figure 4 below includes amounts spent by political parties and candidates. Given that a large proportion of Africa's youth population is either unemployed or underemployed, it presupposes that the African youth stands no chance when it comes to competing financially. The amounts spent on recent elections on the continent have made the expenditure on previous elections seem paltry. For example, Figure 4 (below) shows the cost per voter in the elections of Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana and Kenya between 2015 and 2017.

As can be observed from Figure 4 below, $1.01 per voter was spent in the Rwandan election of 2017; $4 per voter was spent in the 2016 Ugandan general elections; $5.16 was spent in the 2015 general elections in Tanzania; $12 per voter in the 2016 elections in Ghana and $25.4 in the recent elections in Kenya. The Kenyan National Treasury estimates that the election on 8 August 2017 election would cost 49.9 billion Kenyan Shillings ($480 million), making the 2017 election in Kenyan reputedly one of the most expensive in the world. Similarly, the 2016 election in Ghana cost $182 million, 35 times more than it cost to conduct the 2004 elections (Ghana News Agency). It is ironic that while the costs of elections on the continent keep rising, youth unemployment is also on the rise. How then can supposedly unemployed youths finance elections without support?

Source: Government Election Budgets

Figure 4
Cost per voter in elections across selected African countries (in US dollars)

One of the major challenges militating against the involvement of youth in mainstream politics is the structure of the continent's political parties. Akande (2000) defines political parties as organisations or a coalition of individuals and groups whose commonality is their shared political beliefs, ideologies and orientations. They are also usually united by their quest to control government and the apparatus of administrative power within a state. Akande further posits that political parties serve two subordinate goals. First, they are agents of political socialisation by helping to spread and deepen political culture and principle. Second, they help to mobilise and aggregate the choices available to the electorate. Akande presents an idealised definition of political parties that in practice is not typical in Africa. According to Olaiya (2014), political parties have not only become outlets for a display of ethno-religious bigotry in most African states, they have also successfully relegated the youth to the background. It is common to find youth wings formed as addendums to mainstream parties in most political parties in Africa, with the youth becoming a kind of pseudonym for foot soldiers or political thugs. Olaiya further describes the scenario thus:

> …There is no systematic and consciously planned process for engaging youths in politics and governance process. It is deducible that a reason why the political arrangements in many African states have been dominated by adult recycling politicians is because most of the

> parties lack clear-cut process of renewal to accommodate the youth members and taking them through a process of political socialization that bring value-added opportunities to political parties and by extension governance of many African states…More than anything, this buttresses the position that the party leaders in the various political parties are merely interested in creating a coordinating avenue for the physical mobilization of the youth not an attempt to create a corporate entity of youth to partake in the day-to-day administration of the parties.
>
> Olaiya, 2014, p. 7

It can be argued that youth involvement in the political life of most African states does not acknowledge the autonomous agency of the youth. Rather, the narrative about youth involvement in the political life of most African countries assumes that they (the youth) lack a voice of their own. This is suggested by the way adults presuppose that whatever roles played by youths are ultimately those assigned to them by adults, and that they are passive agents. This perspective suggests that even where the youth is brought into politics it is hardly on their own terms but on those of the adults who command the political heights. However, successful youth engagements across the globe negate these perceptions. The Soweto uprising of 1976, the EFF's steady rise to political prominence in South Africa's politics and the catalytic role played by the youth during the Arab Spring clearly show that young people have the capacity not only to initiate social change, but also to sustain it.

It would be imprudent to suggest that Africa's youth have been in a state of political inertia. Although Africa's youth involvement in elective politics has been minimal, as studies highlighted in this research have shown, they have nonetheless had a dynamic role in political activism. For example, Bob-Milliar (2014, p. 169) argues that although Africa's youth have been accused of political apathy, they have not received enough credit for their ability to initiate collective action through social movements. As witnessed in Tunisia, South Africa, Nigeria, Togo and indeed the entire continent, the youth have been instrumental in uniting the citizenry against incompetent, corrupt and authoritarian ruling elites. This view is similar to that held by Casale and Resnick (2011) who posit that while Africa's youth may not be effective in political participation with regard to seeking elective positions, they nevertheless help in building a critical mass of the populace who are discontent with government inefficiency. This was evident in the Soweto uprising, the Arab Spring, and also in efforts by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) during the heyday of military dictatorship in Nigeria to mobilise Nigerians against military tyranny.

The Way Forward: Suggestion from the Youth

As stated earlier, the researcher conducted interviews with randomly selected students of the University of Cape Town's Rondebosch campus. The aim of the interview was to establish suggestions from the youth themselves on the way forward regarding youth involvement in politics.

Questions posed to the students include:

- Are you a card-carrying member of political party?
- Did you vote at the last election?
- Do you think your votes count?
- Would you vote a youth instead of an adult into elective position?
- What is the way forward?

Are you a card-carrying member of political party?
The researcher sought to find out from the students whether they were card-carrying members of a political party. This is important when one considers that one of the criticisms of the youth in Africa is that they complain of marginalisation but do not take concrete steps to address it. Of the 200 students interviewed, 73 respondents said they were active card-carrying members of political parties in the country. Of these 73 students, 41 belonged to the ANC Youth League, 11 belonged to the EFF, and 14 were members of the Democratic Alliance (DA), while 127 participants said they did not belong to any political party.

Did you vote at the last election?
The researcher subsequently sought to establish whether the participants had voted in the last election. The findings were that 103 of the sampled students affirmed that they had voted during the last general elections, while 97 said they did not vote because they believed their votes would not count, that the machinery was already in place for rigging the election, and that it did not matter whether or not they voted. Another reason given by the students who did not vote was that they had not registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and 47 students (or 23.5%) said they did not believe enough in the process to register.

This apathy (expressed by the 97 non-voters) can be explained by the fact that across the globe, young people often find nontraditional means of political participation other than casting votes in ballot boxes. Milan (2005) avers that young people often express their political preferences and frustrations through demonstrations, marches, rallies, and riots. Similarly, Schoeman and Puttergill (2007) argue that although youth participation in the electoral process is significantly low in South Africa, they (the youth) are nonetheless at the forefront

of service delivery protests and other forms of social protest aimed at positive social change. Thus, it can be argued that although some youths do not participate actively in the electoral process, especially actual voting, they contribute in their own way to the success or failure of the process.

Would you vote a youth instead of an adult into elective position?
The researcher asked the respondents whether they would prefer to vote a young person instead of an adult into an elective position. Of the respondents 127 said no, while 73 said yes. When the researcher probed further for the reasons behind the responses, most of the students who said they would not vote for a young person cited immaturity as their major reason.

One student had this to say:

> I doubt that the youths in South Africa are mature enough to lead the nation. Our country is complex; we are daily confronted with the issue of widening inequality, racial segregation, Afrophobia and even ethnic rivalries. It would be difficult for a young person to manage these differences without heating up the polity. Can you imagine if we had Julius Malema shortly after apartheid? Do you think we would still have a nation today? Look at the current land question put forward by the EFF; do you think a mature leader who understands the cost of our democracy would speak in that way? I think that our young people are not ready to lead at any level in the country; you only need to read online discourses to find out how shallow our young people are.

Another student remarked:

> Why do you think organisations require extensive work experience before you can attain senior management level? The reason is simple; they require people with emotional intelligence and maturity that mostly comes with age. If organisations require that individuals acquire wide-ranging experience before assuming managerial positions, why should we commit the future of our country in the hands of learners?

As stated above, 73 of the respondents affirmed that they would vote for a young person. Most of the respondents in this category argued that the only way young people can learn is by putting them in a leadership position. One student recalled that the likes of Chris Hani, Steve Biko and even Nelson Mandela were youths when they took up the gauntlet to lead the struggle against apartheid. One

student had this to say on why she would vote for a youth instead of an adult to elective position:

> Look at the entire continent, which country is working in the real sense of the word? Nigeria, Angola, Zimbabwe and even South Africa, countries with so much potential, have not had any significant socioeconomic and socio-political growth post-independence. If the old system is not working, why not try something new? I am of the opinion that decolonisation as a process is supposed to include a total overhauling of the polity, including removing the so-called founding fathers who suddenly felt a sense of entitlement as if the countries they helped liberate belonged to them.

This assertion was a position held by most of the students who said they would vote for a young candidate if the opportunity presented itself. Most of them averred that the likes of Thomas Sankara, Steve Biko and Patrice Lumumba would have made great leaders had they been given the opportunity to lead. One student who took a more revolutionary position remarked that he would vote for a young candidate whether or not he thought they were competent.

> To be honest, if I see a young candidate on the ballot, I would vote him or her irrespective of his or her competence. I know this may sound illogical, but do not forget that most African countries have been run by trial and error for the past six decades. Why then should we not give a young person a chance so that he/she can learn on the job and earn his or her mistakes. We are already in a dire situation and we honestly have nothing more to lose. Infrastructure is non-existent in most African countries, corruption has been institutionalised, insecurity is a norm and the entire social structures of most countries have collapsed. What exactly are we protecting? What are we afraid of?

Based on these discussions, the researcher sought to know the students' views on how active youth political participation can improve. Some of the common themes that emerged are presented here.

Unbiased media framing
Most of the interviewed students were of the opinion that the media portrays young people only in support roles and not as political actors. They argue that even in parliaments across the continent, but with specific reference to South

Africa, the laudable contributions of young people in law-making do not get as much media attention as their disruptive behaviour. Grabe (2009) states that the media, particularly television, have been used to sway public opinion about candidates and political parties during elections. Given that young people often lack the financial wherewithal to buy media time, their stories are frequently ignored or negatively skewed. It is common to see media depictions of young people as protesters and campaigners but they are rarely framed as political leaders (Strömberg 2004, p. 265; Jankowski & Strate 1995, p. 91).

Abolition of youth wings in political parties
Another common theme that emerged from the interviews was the almost unanimous call by the students for the abolition of youth wings in political parties. Their main argument was that youth wings often serve as a compensation for young people, a devious way for the political class to tell the youth 'we have given you your space'. There was consensus amongst the students that political parties should not have youth wings. Instead, they advocated for greater youth involvement in party decision-making process.
     One of the students had this to say:

> I am of the opinion that the problem of youth active involvement in the political process has its roots in political party structures across the continent. Take for example youth wings of political parties across the continent, how many youth wing presidents have emerged as presidential flag bearers of their parties? The youth wing, in my honest opinion, is a simple case of political settlement of the young. There are no deliberate, strategic and committed efforts aimed at a measurable transition from youth wing to mainstream control of party structures. The success stories in this regard have been rare.

The students' responses corroborate the views of Kanyadudi (2010, p. 10) who remarked that political party youth wings are generally redundant in most African countries. He asserts that for youth leagues to be effective, they must serve not only as foot soldiers for political parties, but they must also be an integral part in nurturing a participant political culture. He argues that it is only if this happens that youth wings will be able to make a meaningful contribution to the process of democratisation in African countries. Kanyadudi further highlighted several points to consider when integrating youth wings into mainstream political party decision-making. He avers that youth wings can be involved in the management of the following activities:

- Coordinating together the financial, human, and material resources in order to facilitate the achievement of organisational (party) goals
- (Jointly) responding to the social needs of the environment surrounding the organisation (party)
- Cultivating an organisational (party) climate so that both individual and collective goals can be achieved
- Carrying out certain functions of the party that are deemed necessary such as planning, goal setting, organising, implementing and controlling
- Party or youth league managers have to be involved in interpersonal, informational, and decision-making roles.

Demonetisation of the political process

The significant impact money has on the political process has been highlighted in this study. Unsurprisingly, most of the students interviewed averred that the political process in Africa is so monetised that the youth is unable to participate because they do not possess the amount required to fund the electoral process ranging from campaigns to advertising and PR stunts. Thus, they advocated for the demonetisation of the electoral process so that potential candidates would not need to have billions in order to run for political office. One of the interviewed students remarked:

> The kind of money spent during elections in Africa is frightening. In South Africa for example, politicians spend billions of rand every time there is an election. How does the youth desirous of partaking in the process compete? The solution is to demonetise. I think that political parties should completely fund the process and not candidates. That way, the youth would only focus on winning the party's ticket and not on funding his/her campaign. This will go a long way in reducing the pressures posed by money or a lack of it, and also encourage greater participation of young people in politics.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Senate recently passed the 'not too young to run' bill which amended sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the country's Constitution, thereby reducing the age of eligibility for elective offices across board. The implication of this amendment is that the youth in Nigeria can now run for the position of president at the age of 35, and for governor or senator at the age of 30, as opposed to the former 40-

and 35-year limits previously the norm. The bill also provides for persons at age 25 to contest for House of Representatives and state Houses of Assembly across the country. Prior to this, the minimum age to run for elective office in Nigeria was 30 years for the House of Representatives or House of Assembly. Although the passage of the bill by the Nigerian Parliament is commendable, it nonetheless addresses only the surface issues and not the root of the problem of youth political apathy in Africa. Structural issues such as youth unemployment, highly monetised political spaces, as well as none too youth-friendly political parties also need to be addressed. There is in addition a need for youth empowerment through job creation to enable them to be independent when seeking elective positions.

Although it is imprudent to use Macron's experience in France as a template for the youth in Africa with regard to their participation in politics, it nonetheless provides an example of how youth involvement in politics should be structured. Competence rather than age should be the major yardstick in choosing leadership and political parties should trust young people as able flag bearers during elections. The continent's youth population is growing astronomically and before long they will be in positions of leadership. The challenge of this scenario is that unprepared youths may assume power, thus negatively affecting the polity. The onus now lies with the current political elites to consciously initiate a process of politically mentoring the youth within their ranks, ensuring that the next generations of leaders are adequately prepared before they move into the political space.

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