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GERONTOCRACY IN AFRICAN GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

The prevalence of gerontocracy, a system of governance where the leadership is predominantly composed of older individuals, presents a significant challenge within the African governance landscape. The trend is intrinsically rooted in historical, cultural, and socio-political settings. While the average age in Africa is around 20, the average age of its leaders is over 60 with its five longest presidencies stretch between 29 and 36 years. The longevity of the leaders in office is matched by their old age, ranging from 71 to 91 years. Paradoxically, while the average age of leaders in the ten developed economies is 52, Africa's average in 78.5. Mirrored against other continents, Africa has a very small proportion of younger leaders between 35 and 55. All these are within the context of a continent that has the youngest population in the world. These scenario throws up significant challenges including shutting out the youth in representation, stagnated policy frameworks, leadership succession risks and the undermining of constitutionalism with leadership remaining in the hands of a few aging elites. The paper situates the discussion around two theoretical frameworks of the Classical Precedents and Traditional Societies schools of thought that birthed and gave legitimacy to gerontocracy as a model of governance. Utilising the secondary research method, we undertake a comprehensive review and analysis of scholarly articles, books, reports, and other credible sources to gather insights, identify trends, and synthesize findings from previous research to proffer a two-pronged pathway out of the quagmire as a pancea: de-monetisation of the political process and the overarching role money plays, so that the political space to be opened for the young who are not financially strong but are rich in ideas to vie for leadership positions; and also, the elevation of competence, character, and capability as the critical yardstick when sourcing for and selecting leaders instead of chronological age alone.

Key Words: Africa, Gerontocracy, Population, Youth, Governance, Landscape

Introduction

The governance architecture on the African continent has for the most part of period since self-rule dawned in the late 1950s and early 1960 been gerontocracy - a system of leadership or government where power and control is largely held and exercised by elderly people or the oldest members of society. While the average age in Africa is around 20, the average age of its leaders is over 60 (Adebayo, 2018). Its five longest presidencies stretch between 29 and 36 years, adding to an aggregate of 169 years. The longevity of the leaders in office is matched by their old age, ranging from 71 to 91 years, and a combined 390 years (Kiwuwa, 2015). While the average age of leaders in the ten most-developed economies is 52, Africa's average in 78.5. Matched by continents, Africa has a very small proportion of younger leaders between 35 and 55 (Kiwuwa, 2015). All these are within the context wherein the continent has the youngest population in the world with a median age of 19.5 years according to the U.N. (2022).

Paradoxically, even though Africa has the youngest population globally, with more than 60% of the entire continent's population under the age of 25 (African Union, 2026), only about 21% of these were born when these presidents rose to power. Contextually, 85% percent of Angolans were not born when Dos Santos came into power in 1979, 83% of Zimbabweans were born after Mugabe first came into power as prime minister in 1980; and 79% percent of Ugandans were born after Museveni took over power in 1986. President Biya has ruled Cameroon longer than most of its citizens have been alive. Entire generations have been born and grown up under his leadership (Kiwuwa, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

There obviously is a yawning leadership age disconnect between the leaders and the led in Africa. While more than 60 percent of Africa's total population is under the age of 25, the median age across the continent is under 20 years old (World Economic Forum, 2023), starkly, many presidents and top leaders in the continent are over 70 or 80 years old. Beyond age, this creates a major misalignment in goals and ideas. Many of the heads of state belong to an older generation of the 1940s and 1950s whose worldview is different and are caught up in outdated policies and leadership mindsets while the young generations embrace new technology and global trends. This is within the context wherein, much of the liberal world embraces the innovativeness of youth – its drive, grit, energy, innovative adaptability, willingness to embrace change and eagerness to learn, while paradoxically, Africa wobbles, shackled by aging leaders unable to keep pace with global developmental trajectory.

For a variety of 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, the commercialisation of the political process and a culture that silences the young (Adebayo, 2018). The residual role that has been thrust on the youths of the continent has been one of bagmen of old politicians and enforcers used to perpetrate violence before, during and after elections, instead of meaningfully participating in decision-making and governance.

There are many negative outcomes from the mismatch between a predominantly youthful population and elderly leadership in Africa. Apart from hindering progress, it leads to

political exclusion and alienation, stifles innovation and slows leadership renewal. In addition, it creates social tensions and contributes to social and political instability. We seek to interrogate this phenomenon, identify the reasons for the continued unpalatable state of affairs and proffer remediation pathways to bridge the generational gap.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this study is based on secondary research, utilizing existing literature and published writings. This approach involves a comprehensive review and analysis of scholarly articles, books, reports, and other credible sources to gather insights, identify trends, and synthesize findings from previous research. By drawing upon established knowledge and documented evidence, this method will provide a robust foundation for identifying the pathways to bridge the generational gap the much-needed youthful leadership deficits.

Theoretical Framework

In seeking an understanding of the origins and foundations of gerontocracy as a model of governance, we draw strength from two theoretical postulations: the Classical Precedents and Traditional Societies schools of thought. These two theories birthed and gave legitimacy to the concept of gerontocracy and situated it as a continuing governance model.

The Classical Precedents theory derives its origins from ancient philosophers like Plato who canvassed and endorsed the merit of hierarchical age structures. They postulated that innately, it was for older men to rule and determine which way societies would be governed and the duty and expectation from the younger generations to submit. One of the earliest historical models of gerontocracy combined with elements of a representative democracy was the Gerousia, an ancient Greek city-state of Sparta that had a council of citizens aged 60 and older serving lifetime terms. The basic qualification was age above all else (Magni-Berton and Panel 2021). This theory and practice draw strength from the classical concept of judicial precedent—often synonymous with the traditional common law doctrine of stare decisis - the legal principle that courts and legal authorities must follow earlier judicial decisions when dealing with cases involving similar facts or legal issues. The underlying intent of judicial precedent is that the present will be governed by the old. This mirrors the gerontocracy model of governance wherein; rulership is derived from the old. (Ebitu, 2026).

The second theory – the Traditional Societies derives its theoretical origins from a variety of indigenous and traditional governance models that have roots in communities. These governance models were prevalent in parts of West Africa, where governance and authority was vested authority in a "Council of Elders" based on the presumption that age correlates with wisdom, social status, and mediation skills. Thus, elders were viewed as the primary custodians of culture, history, and customary law given that pre-colonial governance frameworks placed reliance on oral tradition and equated old age with a vast mental archive of communal precedence, knowledge, wisdom and spiritual alignment with ancestors (Geiser, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

There is no universally established scientific theory that directly proves that the age of an individual or the number of years spent in power alone determines their leadership performance. Academic research generally suggest that leadership effectiveness is influenced by a complex mix of personal qualities, experience, context, and institutional factors—not just age or tenure (Kostadinova & Neshkova, 2025; Ardueser & Lehenbauer, 2020) While some studies link experience to better stability, others link long rule to stagnation or corruption. A review of prevailing literature does not point to an age group that makes for a more effective leaders than the other, as between older and younger leaders. Rather, it shows that there is no simple or uniform linear correlation between leadership effectiveness and age. Leadership, for the most part, rose and fell as a result of other variables including individual qualities, context, and industry, rather than age alone. (Shakur and others, 2024; Ardueser and Lehenbauer, 2020; Wright, 2022).

The above plethora of literature reveal three salient interrelated issues. Firstly, most of the mainstream leadership theories such as Trait Theory (Kendra, 2024), Behavioral Theory (Western Governors University, 2022); Situational Leadership (Ghazzawi, 2017) and Transformational Leadership (Peng, 2023) rather than focusing on age or years in office to measure performance and effectiveness in leadership, they emphasize on qualities, behaviors, and adaptability. Even though these theories all agree that experience can grow with age, older leaders are not automatically or necessarily more effective or visionary than younger ones. In addition, even though leadership effectiveness generally declines with age and experience rather than improving automatically, it has also been found that age and maturity makes for more stable, matured and well-thought-out decision-making.

Secondly, there is a link between tenure and performance. Some of the reviewed literature show that very long tenures are susceptible to "power fatigue," complacency, or detachment from current realities, while very short tenures may not allow enough time for meaningful change. Thus, the relationship between tenure and performance can be described as curvilinear - performance can improve up to a point, then decline if tenure becomes excessive. Thirdly, younger leaders may be more open to innovation and risk-taking, while older leaders may offer stability and experience.

In summary therefore, there is no established causal theory stating that age or number of years in power alone determines leadership outcomes. Performance outcomes are informed by factors such as vision, competence, adaptability, among others. Although, to a general extent, there is no established theory that proves the age of an individual or the number of years spent in power determines such individual’s leadership performance, there are reasons to believe that youthfulness, and a periodic rotation of power could positively impact the development of a low or middle-income country, especially if the age distribution of such country is youthful.

Long Serving Leaders are Less Innovative

It is a socially given reality that having one leader governing a country for a continued period of time, generally longer than 10 years leads to stagnation in innovation in policies. Each leader governs with certain guiding principles based on a particular philosophical approach to

issues. With the passage of time, changes occur in culture and economic behavior and this demands for episodic change in leadership to align it with emerging realities to meet societal needs. Thus, where there are no periodic changes in leadership, the country will be robbed of benefitting from such new trends, ideas and innovations (Anoba, 2018).

A new study from the University of East London (2026) found that long-serving leaders often experience a decline in innovation over time because extended tenures foster cognitive rigidity, risk aversion, and institutional complacency. While the long experience may offer stability and consistency, prolonged leadership can suppress new perspectives and slow an organization's adaptation to fast-changing environments.

Leadership change helps a country grow as it admits new individuals and interest groups into the governance arena alongside fresh ideas, varying perspectives and different choices. This inevitably gives rooms for interrogating old policies and structures through criticism and alternative policies and fixing broken systems with new mindsets as opposed to vested interests in perpetuating the status-quo. Open competition, a clash of ideas and new energy propels societies forward (Lin and Wang, 2018).

Gong (2024) in a recent work found out that political leaders who continue in office for elongated periods tend to decline in effective governance, suffering from mostly cognitive decline. Chikunda & others (2025) identify the path most leadership **trajectories take: they progress from the early years when there is high** energy, fast reform, and clear focus to the middle years when the leadership peaks with stability, mature projects, and steady growth. As nature demands, the later years bring slower response times, risk aversion, protection of vested personal interest over national interest and scandals. From this stage, the quality of leadership is compromised and diminishes, succumbing to a **loss of fresh ideas, the predominance of a "yes" group of loyal supports, fatigue and finally resistance to change.**

Youthfulness is an Advantage

As indicated earlier, youthfulness or old age, in themselves, are not a guarantee for good governance or the possession of effective leadership traits and a blend of the two can have very salutary outcomes. Having said that though, youthfulness is a major asset for African leadership because over 60% of the continent's population is under 25 (World Economic Forum, 2023). This demographic group are capable of bringing digital fluency, fresh ideas, and a deep connection to the daily realities of the world's youngest population, driving modern innovation and inclusive growth. Shutting them out shuts out more than half of the continent's population, throwing away the value they can bring on the table (United Nations, 2022).

Anoba (2018) illustrates the advantage of youth in governance succinctly by stating that even though African leaders use two conventional ways to address the issue of unemployment by creating welfare schemes or investing in education, a smarter and more sustainable response to the challenge would be investing in the tech industry and supporting the urban pop culture. This alone, the author argues, will provide lots of jobs, not to mention other youth-driven opportunities, noting that most African leaders neither grew up experiencing these new trends, would be amendable to imbibing and implementing them.

Experience and Performance

Paradoxically, while age and long tenures brings with them wisdom and experience, it also inadvertently self-attracts physical and mental decline over time, which is a natural occurrence in human nature. While it is also found that long tenures help leaders to conceive and implement sustainable long-term plans and projects, many political studies show that performance often peaks and then drops after a certain number of years in office (Chikunda, 2025). Revealed data shows that, after 10 years in office, generally government expenditure per capita on the military increases on average while it decreases for education and health. Furthermore, autocratic leaders or sit-tight leaders spend more on the military brass than democratic ones, and the reverse for education and health expenditure (Ndayikeza, 2016). The obvious reason for the above is purely self-preservation and not for altruistic reasons.

TABLE

AFRICA'S LEADERSHIP ATLAS

SN	LEADER AND COUNTRY	AGE	YEAR ASSUMED POWER
1	Paul Biya – Cameroon	92	1982
	Jean-Lucien Savi de Tové – Togo	87	2025
2	Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo - Equatorial Guinea	83	1979
3	Alassane Ouattara - Ivory Coast	83	2010
4	Emmerson Mnangagwa – Zimbabwe: His predecessor, Robert Mugabe left office at 93 years	83	2017
5	Yoweri Museveni – Uganda	81	1986
6	Nana Akufo-Addo – Ghana: His predecessor, John Dramani Mahama was 58 years old when he left power	81	2017
7	Denis Sassou Nguesso - Republic of the Congo	82	1979
8	Joseph Boakai- Liberia	81	2024
	Peter Mutharika – Malawi	86	2025
9	Abdelmadjid Tebboune - Algeria	80	Algeria
10	Isaias Afwerki -Eritrea	80	1993
11	Ismail Omar Guelleh- Djibouti	79	1999
12	Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah – Namibia	79	2025
13	Brahim Ghali - Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic	76	2016
14	Dharam Gokhool- Mauritius	76	2024
15	Bola Ahmed Tinubu – Nigeria: His predecessor left office when was 82 years old	74	2023
16	Cyril Ramaphosa – South Africa	73	2018
17	Salva Kiir Mayardit – South Sudan	73	2011
18	João Lourenço – Angola	73	2017
19	Abdel Fattah el-Sisi b- Egypt	71	2014
20	Hassan Sheikh Mohamud- Somali	70	2012
21	Taye Atske Selassie Amde – Ethiopia	70	2024
22	Paul Kagame – Rwanda	68	2000
23	Faustin-Archange Touadéra - Central African Republic	69	2016

24	Sam Matekane – Lesotho	68	2022
25	Kais Saied – Tunisia	68	2019
26	Mohamed Ould Ghazouani -Mauritania	69	2019
27	Romuald Wadagni - Benin	50	2026
28	Azali Assoumani – Comoros	67	1999
29	Carlos Vila Nova - São Tomé and Príncipe	67	2021
30	Wavel Ramkalawan – Seychelles	66	2020
31	José Maria Neves- Cape Verde	66	2001
32	Abdel Fattah al-Burhan - Sudan	66	2019
33	Filipe Nyusi – Mozambique	68	2025
34	Samia Suluhu Hassan – Tanzania	66	2021
35	Hakainde Hichilema – Zambia	64	2021
36	Abdourahamane Tchiani – Niger	65	2023
37	Mokgweetsi Masisi – Botswana	65	2018
38	Félix Tshisekedi - Democratic Republic of the Congo	63	2018
	King Mohammed VI – Morocco	62	1999
39	Julius Maada Bio Sierra Leone	62	2018
40	Adama Barrow – Gambia	61	Gambia
41	William Ruto – Kenya	59	2022
42	Évariste Ndayishimiye - Burundi	58	2020
43	Letsie III – Lesetho	63	1990
44	King Mswati III- Eswatini	57	1999
45	Duma Gideon Boko- Botwana	56	2024
46	Umaro Sissoco Embaló - Guinea-Bissau	53	2020
47	Michael Randrianirina – Madagascar	52	2025
48	Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema – Gabon	51	2023
49	Daniel Chapo – Mozambique	50	2025
50	Mohamed al-Men – Libya	50	2021
51	Abiy Ahmed Ali- Ethiopia	47	2018
52	Bassirou Diomaye- Senegal: His predecessor Macky Sall left office when he was 66 years old	46	2024
53	Colonel Assimi GOITA – Mali: His predecessor Bah Ndaw left office when he was 71 years old	43	2021
54	Mahamat Déby Itno- Chad: Idriss Déby Itno, his predecessor left office when he was 68 years old	42	2024
55	Mamady Doumbouya – Guinea: His predecessor Alpha Conde left office when he was 83 years old	41	2021
56	Ibrahim Traoré - Burkina Faso	38	2022

Source: Culled by the Authors

Why the Preponderance of Aging Leaders in Africa

Africa is a continent of young people, yet it remains dominated by leaders who have long outlived the populations they govern. The Table above reveals that average presidential age of African presidents is around 65 years—with many of the ruling presidents in their 70s, 80s, or 90s—ruling over a continent with a median age under 20 (Worldometers, 2026). A review

of literature points to range of complex, interrelated combination of historical, political, cultural, and systemic factors that enable aged and aging leaders to stay in power for extended periods and hinder younger generations from assuming leadership roles.

Many African countries lack strong, independent institutions oversight bodies and supporting institutions that are positioned within the foundational architecture of constitutional governance to provide checks and balances on presidential power. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2026) identifies such important institutions to independent electoral regulatory bodies, an independent judiciary, assertive legislature, fearless press and robust civil society space. What has been the trend is for sit-tight heads of government to appoint loyalists into key institutions that are designed to be independent. This then allows the appointees to manipulate and compromise the system on behalf of their benefactor, avoid accountability and perpetuate them in power. Across the continent, littered around the canvass of democracy are compromised judiciaries, captured electoral regulatory agencies, rubber-stamp-like parliaments, toothless media and weak civil society (Olaoye & Okunade, 2026). All these work in concert to give an enabling environment for aged and aging leaders to extend tenures and sit- tight beyond tenure thresholds.

The challenge of an aging leadership with sit-tights mindset can be understood within the context that many post-independence or revolutionary leaders fought for independence and tended, after independence, to personalise the nation’s destiny and sense that they own the nation's political identity. They therefore viewed their positions as jobs for life rather than a fixed-term service. Some see themselves in a paternalistic role, similar to traditional chiefs, and resist the idea of stepping down (Pinto, 2021). With this reasoning, most African leaders by their conduct, continue to view power as lifelong and perceive themselves as "fathers" of the nation as opposed to democratically elected public servants (Obong’o, 2013). This negates a foundational concept of democracy which deems the people as sovereign and the powers exercised in a democracy by political actors are merely donated by the people (Weingast, 1997). In addition, having stayed in power for extended periods, they tend to see stepping aside as exposing themselves or their inner circles to corruption charges or loss of immunity.

Another explanation for the aging top leadership of Africa is that these leaders mistake illegal measures to perpetuate themselves in power as legal once they utilise legal routes such as term extensions to achieve the aim. Several heads of states of countries have used this pathway by either “legally’ amending or completely rewriting national constitutions to remove term limits or raise age restrictions, effectively legalizing their indefinite stay in power. These include Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, Alassane Ouattara of Côte d’Ivoire, Azali Assoumani of the Comoros, Ismail Guelleh of Djibouti (Amoah, 2023).

Another reason for the preponderance of aging leaders in Africa is a major barrier of running a successful political campaign for elective office in Africa. This political process in Africa is often extremely expensive, creating a barrier for younger candidates who typically lack the necessary financial resources (Adebayo,2018). Participation in politics or running for office globally and particularly in developing countries is a very expensive and capital-intensive exercise. In Africa, the financial cost and the time required to engage in the political process

is unevenly prohibitive and heavily favor the rich and elites. Party primaries to canvas for nomination and secure a party's ticket often requires massive financial outlays. In many contexts, candidates must pay steep nomination fees or distribute large sums directly to party delegates to win primary elections (Hounkpe & Bucyana, 2014). Padded on that, is the amorphous budgets for "logistics" that often mask funds allocated for bribing election officials, hiring security/thugs, and direct vote-buying. In highly impoverished regions, voters frequently see elections as a rare chance to extract financial gains from politicians whom they may not see until the next election cycle (Okeke & Nwali, 2020).

Additionally, political actors and politicians in a bid to get support from citizens come under a stream of relentless demands to finance personal needs, local projects, and social services (e.g., burials, weddings, community infrastructure) year-round to maintain their support base (Westminster Foundation, 2005). These huge financial outlays pose a severe limiting wedge for the participation of young and poor citizens in politics and inadvertently leaves the space for the elites and financially strong members of society, thus conscripting political space. Poverty diminishes and degrades the ability of individuals from meaningful participation in democratic processes, such as voting or running for office, undermining constitutional principles of representation and equality.

The sheer humongous scale of monies expended to run elections across Africa is astronomically beyond the reach of the young emerging populations in Africa. For example, Vanguard Newspaper (2025) provides data to show that Kenya spent KS36bn or $257m on her 2022 polls; Ghana GHC 786.9m ($52.1m) in 2024 while South Africa's exercise in 2024 cost Rand 2.3bn or $137.8m. Nigerian statistics are scarier. The costs of conducting the exercises have been rising to the extent that Nigeria's elections have panned out as the most expensive in Africa and one of the most expensive in the world. Since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999, the country has conducted six transition elections with the sum of N949.47bn or $4.023bn (Vanguard Newspaper, 2025).

Another explanation for aging leaders in Africa points to external interference. One of the fallouts of the Cold War was that Africa became a battlefield of competing interests between the west and the east competing for dominance (Bryan and Preble, 2021). The weapon of choice utilized by both blocks was the propping up of dictators and autocratic leaders who aligned with their ideological interests, contributing to a culture of entrenched, unaccountable leadership. Historically, there were three major power blocks that used Africa as playing field: while United States of America backed right-wing dictators as a bulwark against communism, the Soviet Union supported and financed left-wing leaning autocrats to expand its global influence on the world stage with the non-aligned nations staying neutral while still undergoing competing pressure from the two global powers (Bhattacharya, 2024); Nkatomba and Opaks, 2024).

There is also a cultural explanation to the prevalence of gerontocracy within Africa's governance landscape. In most African societies, there is the Eldership Principle, wherein, age as a barometer of wisdom, maturity, and emotional stability. In addition, elders are seen as custodians of history, culture, and customary law, elevating them from there to be the natural choice for community leadership Secondly, Given the communal nature of traditional African societies, cultural inclinations view elders as the connection between the living and the ancestors thus ascribing to them sacred authority and moral legitimacy which the younger

members of the community cannot lay claim to (Pugu, 2024). Finally, there are the social structures that place heavy reliance on and deference to seniority. The compound effect of this is a cultural conditioning that imbibes in the young members of the community the virtue of patience to wait their turn. It also discourages and takes a dim view of and prescribe sanctions for younger members of the community who openly challenge or compete against their elders.

Finally, there is widespread corruption fueled a lack of accountability as incumbent leaders deploy state resources to enrich themselves and their cronies. The communal nature of the social fabric of Africa encouraged tribalism whereby citizens, influenced by tribal politics or lacking alternative options acquiesced in some degrees of corruption as long as their community benefits, which further entrenches the ruling elite.

What has been its impact on growth and stability?

Strong correlations exist between Africa's entrenched aging leadership and its present developmental state that has included stagnant or declining economies, raging insecurity and democratic recession (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024). In addition, gerontocracy

has created a profound demographic and political disconnect which may also help to explain far-reaching, documented consequences for the continent's instability and economic retrogression (Sackey, 2021).

In addition, the perpetuation of aging leaders in leadership positions in Africa brings to the fore several significant unintended outcomes that have combined to stultify Africa's growth and development.

Firstly, as these aging leaders continue to perpetuate themselves in power, there are no transparent succession frameworks that trigger succession crisis and high-stakes power vacuums upon their deaths. A Risk Assessment by BMI (Fitch Solutions) shows that countries with the oldest leaders face higher potential of instability explicitly due to these succession anxieties (BMI Fitch Solutions, 2025).

Secondly, the pattern that has been discernable over the years has been that path where these aging leaders, in order perpetuate themselves in power routinely alter national constitutions to scrap term or age limits, by getting pliable national assembles to "legal" pass constitutional amendments. Prominent examples include long-term tenures or constitutional rewrites in countries like Cameroon, Uganda, and Ivory Coast. (Adebayo, 2018)). Thirdly, the other unintended but inevitable outcome of this perpetuation in power has, what the Council of Foreign Relations (2025) calls the emergence of a Coup Belt in Africa by radicalized military officers. The report highlights that where the legal channels for peaceful democratic transition are closed unilaterally by ageing leaders, the only avenues left for ventilation of grievances is social unrest and military interventions.

Conclusion

The continent's young population represents an opportunity for "demographic dividend" that can translate the dream of economic growth into reality. Even though a turnaround is within Africa's grasp, this dividend is not automatic. Africa is facing a demographic crossroad, with over 60% of its population under 25, and the world's youngest and fastest-growing population. These youths carry potential. They come with new ideas and aspirations that have the real promise, if properly harnessed, to unleash a major new burst of economic opportunities around the continent. As the continent's population continues to grow at an exponentially high rates, it becomes essential that African leaders open the political space, make the political climate conducive of the younger generation and motivate them to participate in the political process.

Recommendations

Tackling the entrenchment of ageing leaders in Africa requires a two-pronged approach:

1. Demonetisation of the political process. The significant impact money has on the political process has been highlighted in this study. This will open the space for the young who are not financially strong but are rich in ideas to vie for leadership positions.
2. Competence, character, and capability should be elevated as the critical yardstick when sourcing for and selecting leaders instead of chronological age alone. While age can bring valuable experience, it does not automatically guarantee good governance. Conversely, youth can bring innovation and energy, but without competence, it can lead to erratic decision-making.

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