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Introduction

Abstract

The African continent is predominantly populated by young people who are taking a stand against the current politics in their nations and resisting some stereotypical geopolitical structures and practices. They are attempting to prepare the way for societies that are less hierarchical by establishing new youth movements from urban cultures and suburban areas. African development stakeholders are obsessed with talking about the 'youth bulge', but little attention is paid to the role of millennials in the political leadership and future of their nations. Consequently, there is a yawning knowledge gap about the attitudes and aspirations of young Africans towards governance and leadership in their nations. A further implication is that opportunities to amplify young people's voices are somewhat constricted. This chapter introduces the reader to the central topic of the book focusing on the critical discussion of underlying concepts. The chapter identifies the range of knowledge gaps that the book tries to fill. The chapter also establishes the interdisciplinary audiences and stakeholders that may find the book useful. A gentle overview of the different data sources used in the book is provided followed by brief summaries of each chapter.

1.1.   Overview of the Book

The African continent is predominantly populated by young people (Drummond et al, 2014). By the beginning of 2035, the number of young Africans reaching working age will exceed the combined total for the rest of the world (UN-DESA, 2019). This trend is expected to continue every year for the rest of the current century. Estimates also indicate that by 2050, one in every four humans on Earth will be African and by the end of the century, Africans will account for 40% of the world's population (UN-DESA, 2019).

There is growing recognition that Africa's impending demographic dividend will add to its economic significance (Ojo, 2020). For instance, evidence shows that since 2000, roughly 50% of the countries in the world with the highest annual growth rate are located in Africa (Signe, 2018). Similarly, it is expected that 4 in 10 Africans will join the ranks of the global middle and upper classes by the end of the present decade (Sine, 2018) Furthermore, by 2030 household consumption would have grown to $2.5 trillion, more than double the figure of $1.1 trillion in 2015 (Signe, 2018).

Despite its rising economic significance, the rapid change being experienced across Africa also presents monumental challenges that are not necessarily being contained within the boundaries of the continent. The persistently high absolute number of people in poverty (Barrett and Carter, 2013), the absence of good quality physical infrastructure (Ojo et al., 2018), ongoing conflicts and insecurity challenges (Ojo and Ojewale, 2019), and continuing problems with democratic governance and corruption (Kieghe, 2016) are combining to make Africa the world's largest source of emigrants (Asserate, 2018). There is now broad consensus among academics, policy makers and civil-society representatives that the current African political class have not succeeded in their mission to build nations characterised by justice and progress (Cheeseman, 2015). Young Africans are taking a stand against the current politics in their nations. They are attempting to prepare the way for societies that are less hierarchical by establishing new youth movements from urban cultures and suburban areas. African stakeholders are obsessed with talking about the 'youth bulge', but little attention is paid to 'how' young Africans wish to be governed. Consequently, there is a yawning knowledge gap about the governance aspirations of young Africans.

There is an increasing recognition that beyond a continents overall size, its age structure is of great economic significance (Canning et al., 2015). Given the demographic configuration of the African continent, it is almost impossible to effectively open up development without adequately considering the governance aspirations of young people. The large numbers of young Africans offer the nations across the continent the potential to achieve rapid economic growth and social transformation. Secondly, if Africa's demographic dividend is maximised by understanding aspirations of its youthful population and providing supportive governance environments, this can translate into a reduction of dependency ratio across the continent. Reduced dependency ratio combined with policies that nurture health and education while also promoting employment opportunities can ultimately translate into sustainable development.

Deriving possible benefits of Africa's demographic dividend therefore starts with understanding the governance aspirations of young people and involving them in decision-making. However, widespread evidence suggests the contrary. It appears that young Africans are being excluded from decision-making and they are being denied the chance to contribute to their economies and societies (Mengistu, 2017). The frustration being experienced by large sections of Africa's youthful population is contributing to social and political instability and creating room for civil unrest. Some scholars have described this scenario as an impending demographic disaster – the opposite of a possible demographic dividend (Agbor et al., 2016).

In this book, the concept of 'millennial' is used to refer to a category of young people that the author aims to understand, describe and possibly educate. The term 'millennial' is widely used but not always formally defined. However, most scholars use it to describe people born between the early 1980's and 2000 (Bannon et al., 2011; Holliday and Li, 2014). Although it is believed that millennials now form a sizeable and influential proportion of Africa's population, the Euro-American characterisation of millennials may not necessarily be applicable within an African context.

In Euro-American literature, the millennial generation, also known as Generation Y or Gen Y – that is young people born between 1980 and 2000, which has turned its back on politics (Yamamoto et al., 2016). It is believed that this generation is comfortable with the digital world and with social networks (Loader et al., 2014) and is at ease when it comes to social media. This population cohort also grew up surrounded by various digital learning technologies therefore print newspapers and serious news analysis on television plays a minima role in the leadership and political socialisation members of this generation.

There are some similarities and sharp contrasts between African millennials and their counterparts in the West. While millennials in the West enjoy the fruits of continuous technological progress, their counterparts across rural Africa struggle (Adeniran, 2019). Furthermore, Euro-American literature have established that millennials in the West are experiencing massive uncertainty as a result of the unpredictability of the age in which we live. An ageing population in Western nations is believed to be contributing to the shock and economic pressure being experienced by millennials in the West (Harper, 2013). On the contrary, Africa's population is not necessarily ageing.

In spite of their comparatively low income, African millennials appreciate and embrace technology like their Euro-American counterparts. However, there are stark inequalities between urban and rural areas in terms of the uptake of these technologies (Adeniran, 2019). Consequently, those millennials residing within the countryside have not sufficiently latched onto the benefits of technology and its associated trends to create opportunities for themselves.

Unlike their counterparts in the West, the potentials of African millennials is often not matched with an equal measure of opportunity. For instance, African millennials have repeatedly highlighted the education gap as a source of frustration (Pankhurst et al., 2017; Musau, 2018). Quality is generally found to be lacking at all levels of the education system, a system characterised by a lack of investment that has resulted in poorly trained teachers, decaying infrastructure and high levels of pupil and teacher absenteeism.

Similarly, the scale of unemployment experienced by African millennials distinguishes them from their Western counterparts. There is strong opinion among African millennials that the labour market has been hijacked by corruption and nepotism (Akande, 2014), with some employers forming a dangerous habit of deliberately discriminating against young people (Altman, 2007). Just as underemployment levels are very high among African millennials (Fox et al., 2016), it is also common practice to find people doing jobs that they're not qualified for. Public sector appointments are largely political, thereby creating a situation where square pegs are forced into circular holes (Kieghe, 2016).

Socio-economic polarisation is adversely affecting African millennials. However, the disruptive influence that polarisation may be exerting on their leadership and democratic ideals has not been examined and established in detail. Some have argued that forms of anti-democratic norms are being engendered among African millennials as a result of polarisation but there are knowledge gaps about the nature and extent of such norms. This book utilises a mixed-methods approach to address and unpack these issues.

1.2.   Why this Book Was Written

There is currently no clear narrative about why Africa's current political class are denying young people the opportunity to chart the future direction of their nations. Furthermore, there is no firm picture of how young Africans wish to be governed. This book is offered as a contribution that embraces an interdisciplinary approach to fill these knowledge gaps. The book is about political leadership and governance in Africa going forward and the role of millennials. Africa is in the process of significant change. The nature, dimensions and what change might bring would depend on young people who now represent three quarters of the population of the continent (UN-DESA, 2019). This book contributes to ongoing discussions and provides a pathway, guide, and handbook for a new generation of young African leaders to emerge, not to miss the opportunity for real transformative change.

This book provides a thought-provoking analysis of how political leadership deficit has contributed to underdevelopment across Africa and how millennials can be the catalyst for change in leadership and governance behaviour and to improve the fortunes of Africa's estimated 1.3 billion people. This is intended to be the go-to book and companion for African millennials in and out of political leadership, inspired by the factual circumstances of Africa's significant history, a deep understanding of current global issues, geopolitics, and power relations, and motivated by an ambitious vision of Africa's role in the world.

1.3.   Who Should Read this Book?

This book has multiple audiences and is therefore not limited to a specific group. However, scholars and students of African Development Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, History, International Studies, Women's Studies, Economics, Social Policy, Policy Administration, Black Studies and Caribbean Studies will find the book interest.

We also believe that the book has a global appeal especially for those who are interested in development issues across the various African regions and those corners of the globe with comparative challenges to governance and development. The book has global appeal for areas of the world considered to be economically and politically challenged. It will serve as a template for addressing the obstructions faced by millennials and galvanising the potential of the same cohort.

Parts of the book will be of interest as reading material in master's degree courses. This may stimulate students to engage the full book. The book will be of interest to doctoral candidates in the fields of Geography, Social Policy, Leadership and Development Studies. It is likely that they will find the book useful as a reference resource. The book will further be of interest to policy makers and professionals interested in the possibilities of and constraints to improving their understanding and responses to youth and development matters.

The audience for this book includes instructors across several disciplines, students in higher educational institutions and practitioners in industrial settings. We recognise that some users of the book might be reading it for their own professional purposes, while others might be reading it as assigned for a course. We have therefore written the book in a way to facilitate meaningful learning for different stakeholder groups.

1.4.   A Note on Sources

This book is based upon insights drawn from a number of empirical scientific projects. The research design underpinning these projects was therefore structured as a robust blueprint which secondary and primary data collection processes.

Data from the United Nations Statistics Division was incorporated into this book. The Division is committed to the advancement of the global statistical system. Therefore, they compile and disseminate global statistical information, develop standards and norms for statistical activities, and support countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems. Furthermore, the Division facilitates the coordination of international statistical activities and support the functioning of the UN Statistical Commission as the apex entity of the global statistical system.

This book also subsumes data from the Fragile States Index (FSI). The FSI is produced by the Fund for Peace (FFP) and it measures the vulnerability of states to implode. The FSI not only highlights the normal pressures that all states experience but also identifies when pressures exceed the resilience capacity of a state. The FFP assembles a substantial number of reports and information from around the world, detailing existing social, economic, and political pressures. Based on the comprehensive social science approach of their Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST), data from three main streams (pre-existing quantitative data sets, content analysis and qualitative expert analysis) are triangulated and subjected to critical review to generate the final index scores (FFP, 2018). The higher the index score the closer a state is to failure.

The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) The was set up by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation in 2007 to promote meaningful change and democratic development on the African continent. This is being achieved by providing the tools to support progress in political leadership and public governance. This book embraces the IIAG data for understanding and visualising some patterns and aspects of governance which is described by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation as governance as "the provision of political, social, economic and environmental public goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their government, and that a government has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens" (MIF, 2020).

Effective governance is regarded as a major contributor to the social integrity of any country. It includes the internal social structures and processes internal that make up the foundation upon which economic and environmental progress relies. This is important for young Africans. Our book complements other governance indices with the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) (Kaufman et al. 2010). The rationale for examining governance through the lens of multiple measures is to gain a holistic and objective perspective on the subject. The WGI gives a sense of social integrity and resilience.

Another important dataset integrated into this book is the World Population Prospects (WPP) which is published annually by the United Nations Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. This resource represents a comprehensive data source for population and official projections of global demographic estimates undertaken by the Population Division since 1950. The database provides major demographic indicators like birth rate, death rate, mortality rate, fertility rate etc. for each member country of United Nations for 1950-2050 by age and sex of the population (UN-DESA, 2017).

One of the most important sources of secondary information used in our book is the Afrobarometer Study. The Afrobarometer study focuses on public attitudes, democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related public safety and social issues in more than 35 countries in Africa (Afrobarometer, 2016). The study which has been ongoing since 1999 is implemented through a partnership comprising the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD Ghana), Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin, Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi, the Democracy in Africa Research Unit in the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town and the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University.

The primary datasets were derived from interactive discussions and key informant interviews. Much of this book was written during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which frustrated efforts by the authors to conduct large scale primary field research. Nevertheless, contextual information was captured from a broad range of stakeholder groups and individuals which contribute toward making the discussions in this book robust and defensible.

1.5.   Structure of the Book

This book is written to help readers gain proficiency in understanding some essential constructs underlying leadership and governance nexus as it relates to millennials. The book should also help readers gain a grasp of some theory, scientific methodology as well as application of techniques which can be replicated in other contexts.

Chapter two paints a picture of the hopes, fears and aspirations of African millennials. The chapter also engages the concept and meaning of aspiration within the context of governance. This is followed by a discussion of the pillars of governance. This discussion highlights the contribution of aspects of historical African culture in shaping modern day governance values and institutions. The chapter also evaluates approaches that are used to measure good governance and stresses that these existing metrics do not focus on young people. The chapter concludes by explaining the impact of poor political leadership on young Africans.

Chapter three focuses on some of the key dynamics that young Africans must consider in order to emerge from the shadows of political strongmen. The chapter begins with a detailed account of the origins of strongman mentality. A mapping of the mindset of the typical African strongman follows this with a robust analysis of how strongmen consolidate their power base. Towards the end of the chapter, the specific distractions put in place by strongmen are discussed with an emphasis on why young Africans have been unable to mount a formidable challenge.

Chapter four establishes the underlying determinants of the propensity for millennials to join social rebellions. In this chapter, logistic regression analysis was used to predict the propensity for social revolutions among thousands of millennials spread across thirty-six African countries. Results derived from the empirical analysis suggest that discontent with corrupt governments has been driven to the tipping point, fuelled by thousands of young unemployed people who are linked via social media as they have never been before. The results further indicate that economic development matters (overall management of the economy, handling of educational needs, crime and the provision and maintenance of infrastructure), regime types (constitutional monarchies) and state effectiveness (performance of parliamentarians and heads of states) need to be given careful consideration.

Chapter five argues that existing global metrics of governance do not explicitly focus on millennials in Africa because the indices often do not incorporate direct opinions of millennials across the continent. Therefore there is a significant knowledge gap about the political and governance orientation of Africans across several countries. This chapter discuss how a numerical approach has been used to group African nations according to the aspirations of young people for good governance.

Chapter six concludes the book by pulling together the body of findings through an integrated analysis that combines various sources of information. By bringing together and linking the themes in this book, this chapter encapsulates what African millennials need to be doing to channel their energy away from violent agitations into mobilisation and organisation as a call to action to bring about positive transformational change.

1.6.   Conclusion

There are some exciting precursors and texts to the subject of leadership and governance in Africa. While they provide a wealth of insight, they may be criticised for being far less forward-looking. There is clearly a significant gap in the market. Prior to the publication of this book, there has been no known published work that succinctly connects the past, present and future of African and global geopolitics in an accessible way that resonates with the yearnings of Africa's millennial generation. Furthermore, we believe that the specific focus of our work on African millennials will help to properly amplify the voices of Africa's burgeoning youth population in a way that should also grab the attention of governments, scholars, students and international development partners working towards a more prosperous and peaceful Africa. Readers from these contexts would choose this book because of the authors good grasp of everyday lived experiences of African millennials and how the book unmasks solutions and pathways that can help to address persisting problems for the purpose of good governance today and in the future.

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