Governance and Egalitarianism in Africa: Exploring a Leadership Battle between the Young and Old Political Leaders

Gyaviira Kisitu
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1084-7638

Margaret Ssebunya
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1206-8083

Abstract

Despite decades into independence, many African countries still wrestle with the consequences of poor service delivery as well as an unconstitutional hold onto power. Most of these setbacks have been pinned on the flaws of the old generation of political leaders, often by a new wave of young political leaders. The latter have thus penetrated political leadership spaces to assert themselves as alternative leaders for the African continent. However, this has been vigorously challenged by the incumbents, most of whom belong to the older generation. This development has played more a role in creating a generational conflict among political leaders than in responding to humanitarian concerns. Drawing from selected cases in some African countries, the paper sheds light on the current state of political leadership on the continent. It argues that competition for political leadership between the young and old generations, and the grip on power of the latter are some of the critical problems hampering the realization of democracy, service delivery and peace on the continent.

Keywords: Africa, Democracy, Egalitarianism, Generational conflict, Governance, Humanitarianism, Old generation political leaders, Political leadership, Young political leaders.

Gyaviira Kisitu & Margaret Ssebunya.

Introduction

According to the Africa Union Commission Agenda 2063 (2015), the 'Africa we Want', seeks to be characterized by,

> inclusive growth and sustainable development, integration, unity based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance, good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law, peace and security, strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics, people-driven development and reliance on the potential of the African people.

Despite this set of 'imaginations' and 'ambitions', many African countries continue to be marred by challenges, many of which are catastrophic and life threatening. The deteriorating healthcare systems, rampant civil conflicts, hunger, corruption, military coups, election violence and extrajudicial killings are part of the many challenges that continue to threaten the peace and development of many African societies. The perpetuation of these challenges has led to loss of human life and the destruction of the environment across the African continent, even though the magnitude differs from one context to the other. The chapter notes that such situations have succeeded in undermining the attainment of peace and development in many African societies. They have further led to an emergence of a generational conflict between young political leaders and the old generation of leaders[1] who still control much of political power. Citing the increasing failure of the current political leadership in responding to humanitarian challenges in society today, the YPL have penetrated political landscapes to assert themselves as capable alternative leaders and thus destabilized their traditionally constructed identity – *leaders of tomorrow*.

The penetration of the YPL into spaces predominantly occupied by the OGL has not been well received by the latter who happen to control the poli-

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[1] The term 'old generation of leaders' (OGL) is used with reference to political leaders who have remained in power for long. The terms 'young political leaders' and 'young generation of leaders' (YPL) are used interchangeably with reference to political activists/ politicians below the age of 40 who attempt to persuade the older generation of leaders to relinquish power.

tical space. The YPL have often been seen as less competent to assume the highest leadership positions, such as being presidents of political parties, ministers or heads of state. They are deemed unruly, mercenary and less knowledgeable about liberation histories, a development which has ignited protests and defiance in young people's camps. Although young people have been absorbed in political leadership and administration in some countries, there is a certain limit they can go, and this is not evenly spread across the continent. The conflict between the YPL and OGL has not been constructive for issues of humanitarianism. Resources that would aid the provision of healthcare services, infrastructural development, mitigation of environmental threats, and basic education are channelled elsewhere to guarantee power to long-time political leaders and to suppress political opposition, civil unrest, and resisting pressure groups. The YPL on the other hand, have formed pressure groups and political movements and seem determined to oust their political grandparents. Whether the struggles are merited or not, in some instances they have led to loss of life, destruction of property, unlawful imprisonment and torture, or what Claude Ake (1993:240) rightly describes as 'vicious circle of coercion, and alienation leading to tragic consequences'. The question is, how does this state of conflict between the YPL and the old generation of political leaders contribute to the well-being of a local person whose only interest is to have basic healthcare services, food, shelter, and children attending school? How will this contribute to the achievement of Africa's golden aspiration – Agenda 2063? This paper raises questions about the attainment of these aspirations, given the nature and magnitude of the prevailing political leadership challenges that African countries continue to experience.

Through the democratic egalitarianism conceptual framework, the paper attempts to expose the grip on power of the OGL, its conflict with the YPL, and how these developments impede the realization of constitutional democracy on the continent. Drawing from Ronald Dworkin (2000), egalitarianism can be understood as a doctrine of political philosophy advocating equality, where all people ought to be treated the same and enjoy equal social status. Egalitarianism could be understood with reference to fundamental underpinnings of democracy. From a philosophical perspective, Bernard Matolino (2018:96) states, 'democracy is about the people', but not the will and aspirations of the rulers. In this way, the people's uncompromised participation, their consent to decision making and public accountability of

those in power is fundamental to democracy (Ake 1991:34). Further, democracy would dictate that leadership upholds dignified existence. Democracy should be cautious of fulfilling 'political imperatives such as freedom of the individual, equal and fair treatment before the law, and freedom from being victimised by the State' (Matolino 2018:xi). Democratic egalitarianism is a dictation of a justice code, holding that society is just if, and only if, its practices and institutions are in accord with the shared values of a constitutional democracy. According to this framework, the current state of political leadership in Africa is responsible for conflicts related to issues of leadership and governance between the OGL and the emerging YPL on the continent.

The chapter argues that the conflict of leadership interests between the YPL and OGL is part of a critical problem hampering the realization of democracy, development and peace on the continent. From the egalitarian perspective, it is crucial for leaders to act in accordance with the needs and aspirations of the people. This would involve, among other factors, enabling job creation environments, access to proper healthcare, good education systems, justice, transparency and accountability, free and fair elections, as well as the attainment of long-lasting peaceful existence and the development of all people. Egalitarian principles would imply that countries choose actions according to impartial standards, treating all citizens impartially with equal concern and respect, regardless of their status in society. The paper argues that embracing egalitarian principles in accordance with African values on leadership may respond to the generational conflict regarding leadership and governance and thus promote constitutional democracy on the African continent.

Political Leadership Landscape and Challenges in Africa: A Brief Overview

It is important to ask ourselves, 'Where is Africa today and how would Africa describe herself should she get an opportunity?' Of course, this triggers a plethora of responses, depending on the respondent's standpoint. For Heather Deegan (2009:14), 'Africa' is almost used as a 'brand name' to identify, market, promote, condemn, herald, or indeed call attention to any facet of the continent that may concern the international and globalized environment. If it is not violence, conflict, poverty, rape or HIV/AIDS that is grabbing the head-

lines, it is political mismanagement, arms dealing, corruption or terror. Noting from a leadership perspective, John Igue (2010:115) holds that many African societies are identified with poor rational management of people and public affairs. He argues that many of these societies are characterised by failed attempts to embrace foreign economic models championed by liberal economics, and as such they are bogged down in misery, being victims of poor political management. Scholars such as Patrick Bond (2000) view as unsuccessful the story of liberal and neoliberal economics in Africa in the early 2000s, while a comparable experience seems to embody Africa's economic development even today. This is mainly because, as African states continue to embrace the spirit of liberal and neoliberal economics, societies continue to be overburdened by ills of economic biases where social economic development is virtually controlled by the elite, and African governments continue being suffocated by decades old debts, while accumulated wealth continues to be concentrated among the few at the expense of the majority (Coulibaly *et al*. 2019).

Yet it is also true that the African continent, through its leaders, at various continental and regional levels, does acknowledge the existence of the above complex challenges, which are at the same time exacerbated by issues of governance and growing terror attacks. Africa is a continent that sobs with experiences of terror attacks whose target is to intimidate a particular community or destabilize politico- economic systems (Cilliers 2003:92). Most prominently, two terrorist groups are internationally known to be based and operational in Africa. These are Boko Haram of Nigeria and Al-Shabaab of Somalia. In recent years, the presence and operation of these groups, along with their allies across the continent, have been destructive, especially to hu-man life and property, causing huge setbacks to development. They have con-tributed to many deaths through suicide bombings, abductions of civilians, targeting places of worship, entertainment, hotels, shopping malls and villages (Falode 2016; Anderson & McKnight 2015). Further, these attacks have given rise to abductions and the displacement of people, both internally and across borders. Such are the experiences of terrorism that have been experienced in countries like Nigeria, Somalia, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Sudan, Kenya, Mali, and Niger[2].

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[2] There have been other incidents of terrorist attacks in other African countries but only these have been mentioned here given their top rankings on the global measurement of terrorist impact by the Global Terrorism Index 2018.

According to the Global Terrorism Index (2018:3), Nigeria and Somalia rank third and sixth, respectively on the global measurement of terrorist impact. Acts of terrorism do not seem to occur without possible explanations. Studies on terrorism have indicated that conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism in most countries throughout the world with other incidents related to issues of social alienation, lack of economic opportunity and involvement in an external conflict (Krieger & Meierrieks 2011; Feldman 2009).

The African countries ranking the highest on the scale of terrorist attacks are also known to face soaring levels of conflicts. This is the case in countries such as Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. In these countries, internal conflicts play a big role in fuelling acts of terrorism within the respective states and on the continent.

African leaders today still grapple with economic growth, which in many sub-Saharan African states is still recorded as slower. African leaders such as Yoweri Museveni of Uganda have long discussed this aspect. Museveni (cited in Deegan, 2009) has argued that economic growth on the continent has been hindered by 'underdevelopment in productive forces such as science, technology, managerial capacity and skilled labour'. However, the question of economic growth is far more complex. Lack of transparency and accountability in administering public goods can be argued to be a hindrance to economic development in Africa. These defects tend to be promoted by personal interests and short-term focus on the control of resources, rather than paying attention to the needs of the country. This is demonstrable in the high rates of corruption cases exhibited in many African states today. It is almost a daily experience that accessing public goods and services calls for some sort of bribery. While launching the African Union theme of the year 2018 on fighting corruption on the continent, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria (2018:1) rightly recognised 'corruption as indeed one of the greatest evils of our time as it compromises the efficiency of governmental institutions, rewards those who do not play by the rules and also creates a system of distortion and diversion thereby destroying all efforts at constructive, just and fair governance'. According to Coralie Pring and Jon Vrushi (2019:4), a survey on 47 000 citizens in 35 countries across Africa indicates that 'more than half of all citizens think corruption is getting worse in their country and that their government is doing a bad job at tackling corruption'. It would therefore be very difficult to contemplate development in a situation where public goods and services such as education opportunities, food, water, and health are accessed by paying bribes.

African leaders' attempts to develop their economies are further stifled by the threat of drought, floods and desertification. Case studies on drought and desertification in Africa show that livelihoods of millions of people in Africa are threatened due to the effects of climate change. Regions such as the Sahel of northern Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa and the area covering the horn of Africa have experienced droughts in recent decades. Although some efforts have been made by African countries in tackling drought and desertification, these efforts are hampered by high levels of poverty, weak institutional capacities, and challenges in resource mobilization, weak information bases, and inadequate access to affordable, appropriate technology (Economic Commission for Africa 2007:45 - 47).

The question as to whether political leaders in Africa adhere to democracy and have respect for human rights and freedoms are contested, as many of them have been found to be totalitarian and abusive of human rights. In cases where freedom of expression, inclusiveness and acknowledgment of political opponents have been undermined, the extent of democratic rule in particular African countries has been questioned. This has been the case in countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where political leaders have autocratically stayed in power ranging between 30 to 41years.The same has happened in Angola, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Sudan, Togo, and Uganda, where repression has been used on dissenting political voices (Amnesty International 2018; Felter 2020).

The meaning of 'democracy' and its lenses of analysis raise contextual challenges in Africa. Debates as to whether solutions to Africa's problems could be met under majoritarian, consensus or deliberative forms of democracy continue to unsettle many African thinkers (Matolino 2018; Carew 2004). Yet, this is not surprising, especially when it comes to achieving a mutual understanding of what constitutes democracy. Moreover, the term, 'democracy' from its sixth-century BC birth and usage remains contested and complex. In fact, in Athens where democracy is said to have been born, women and slaves were excluded. Additionally, some of the great philosophers have expressed their doubts on the effectiveness of democratic governance. For instance, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato held that the idea of democracy was worse and chaotic for government and therefore he preferred aristocratic rule by a philosopher king. Similarly, for Winston Churchill, cited in Samuel Huntington (1996:9), it is difficult to categorically assert whether 'democracy is perfect

or all-otherwise [as] it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time'. Therefore, one often wonders whether what is deemed 'democratic' in a given state equally applies to another. For example, some countries argue grievously against the recognition of homosexuality as a sexual orientation, while others have gone ahead to legitimise it. The irony is that all these countries claim to be democratic and defenders of human rights and many of them have ratified and signed international treaties and conventions that advocate democracy, the rule of law and upholding human rights.

The above encounters are only a tip of the iceberg of the challenges faced by the contemporary African political leaders, and which this paper cannot claim to exhaust. However, it is the argument of this paper that these challenges are interlinked with the state of political leadership many African states have faced historically and in the present. The political leadership in many African countries is part and parcel of the problem faced by the continent, given its continuous failure to respond appropriately to the needs of citizens. The danger equally seems to lie firstly in the choices these leaders make; secondly, in the nature and philosophy of their leadership; thirdly, in leadership-related conflicts between the young and old generations; and lastly, the failure to navigate between private/personal and public/national interests. In the cases analysed for this paper, it has been found that in countries where leaders have stayed in power for long there exists a related chain of the contestations enumerated above.

Staying in power for long has earned many leaders certain identities such as 'Africa's leaders for life', or 'African leaders addicted to power' (Felter 2020). These identities are constructed in the face of a growing opposition to the OGL. This antagonism, which is mostly championed by the generation of YPL, attempts to cast doubts on purported ideals and efficacy of the present leadership styles and philosophies of the OGL, who do not seem to want to relinquish power in their respective countries. This wave of opposition is experienced in instances where the young people have fronted themselves to become leaders of major political parties where they publicly denounce the once revered fathers and grandfathers of independence. This has been the case in countries such as South Africa where young leaders such as Julius Sello Malema of the Economic Freedom Fighters and Mmusi Maimane, a former leader of the Democratic Alliance (South Africa's main opposition party), have entered into the political arena, which has traditionally been occupied by their

elders. In other sub-Saharan African countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana and Malawi, the major opposition is led by men in their thirties and forties. In Uganda, a 37-year-old musician and recently turned politician Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, *alias Bobi Wine*, crafted a resistance movement 'People Power, our Power'. Primarily, this movement seeks to unite Ugandans on issues such as ending human rights abuses, corruption, over taxation, improved service delivery and redefining the rule of law, with a focus on the young people. The evolution of young political leaders in African states shows that there is an attempt to redefine the notion of leadership and more so to challenge the status quo that simply identifies young people as 'leaders of tomorrow', even though the so-called 'tomorrow' never comes. In a state of defiance, young people seem to argue, 'We are leaders of today'. Also, there is a sense of a long-lived dissatisfaction with post-independence experiences in many African states, especially where the ruling elite seems to have turned into oppressive regiments to their fellow citizens. The effect of these experiences is what Ake (1993:240) describes as 'a demand for a second independence, this time from indigenous leadership whose economic mismanagement, together with brutal repression have made mere survival all but impossible'. Current evidence of young people's ambitions for high-profile political positions represents a generational wave attempting to break 'the monopoly of power enjoyed by this failed leadership … in order that power can be transferred to the people who have little to lose and much to gain' (Ake 1993:240). However, this has not been received the by the OGL, even though there is evidence that the present leadership in many African states has gradually recorded little progress in economic development, security, inclusive government, human rights, and respect for constitutional democracy. In this paper, the African political landscape shows evidence of what is termed as a generational conflict for leadership and governance in Africa.

Generational Conflict for Leadership and Governance in Africa

As noted in the section above, there is a generational conflict for leadership and governance in many African countries. Generational conflict comes about whenever the interests or ideals of one generation conflict openly with those of another generation. Seemingly motivated by how young people have taken up high-profile leadership positions in countries such as France, Ukraine,

North Korea, Georgia, San Marino, New Zealand, Austria and Costa Rica (Eliza Relman 2017), and in view of the endemic problems facing the African continent, young generation leaders have embarked on public scrutiny and criticism of the old generation of African leaders. For several reasons, the older generation is blamed for lacking the capability and capacity to fully comprehend the problems facing their citizenry and the competence to provide sustainable solutions. The young generation of leaders believe they are better placed to steer Africa from the vicious circles of endemic problems and also re-spond to the challenges and opportunities of globalization. As Mohiddin (2007:28) notes, the old generation of leaders in a number of African countries is blamed for the failure 'to create an environment that would enable the continuous evolution of succeeding generations of young African leaders with competence, integrity, vision and commitment'. In many African countries, no specific measures are taken to prepare the young generation for leadership. Even though there are many young people with the potential for leadership, the socio-political and economic environments in many African countries, are such that it is practically impossible for youthful and knowledgeable leaders with more productive visions different from those of the older incumbents.

The age hierarchy encapsulated and handed on from generation to generation, in African culture, has meant that there are fewer chances and opportunities for young people to express themselves and to participate significantly and meaningfully in the national social and political discourse of their countries. While some of the old-generation leaders acknowledge the challenges confronting their nations and the failure to address them, they are suspicious of the emerging young generation of leaders and are hostile towards them. The new wave of young leaders seems to have also been instrumental in creating fear and insecurity among the older generation who, in their daily exercise of power, appear to oblivious to the needs, fears and aspirations of the electorate. In Uganda, for instance, a group of 26 young people (including Members of Parliament) were reportedly arrested and tortured during the Arua Municipality by-election in August 2018 – an election won by the opposition. The report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the investigations into the condition of MPs indicated that they were severely tortured – presumable by security personnel supportive of the existing leadership. The Committee demanded the prosecution of those involved (Amule Doreen *et al*. 2018), but no action was taken on the agents. The victims were released several months later after all charges had been dropped.

Another generational conflict on the African continent emerges from a poor general acceptance, support and grounding of constitutionalism[3]. In some cases, there appear to be a lack of respect for the constitution and, or the amendment of the Constitution in favour of old-generation leaders. As a result, leadership succession in a number of African countries has tended to be a product of crude political manipulations, rebellions or military coups rather than the peaceful application of the constitutional process. In the last decade alone, Africa has experienced six successful coups d'état (most recent being in Mali on 18-19August 2020), and 27 coup attempts (Harding 2019; Birikolang 2013). In some countries like Uganda there has been political manipulation of the Constitution to remove the presidential term and age limit against the wishes of the citizenry – a move hurtling towards establishing a life presidency. With reference to the Ugandan case, critics have noted that a constitutional amendment to remove the upper age limit for presidential candidates[4] sought to safeguard the incumbent president in power (Kaheru 2017). Prior to the passing of the law, Members of Parliament, mainly young-generation leaders, hurled punches and clambered over benches in defiance of the Bill. The removal of the presidential age limit was met with a lot of resistance and opposition not only from the young opposition leaders, but also from civil rights activists, religious leaders and members of the public. It is also noted that the country has never seen a peaceful transition of political power since attaining independence from the British in 1962 (Aljazeera 2018). This and many examples elsewhere in Africa indicate that politics is personalized and transformed into a means of acquiring power. Those in positions of leadership would seem to do all they can to keep others out. They would easily ignore the democratic principles, norms and conventions to which their countries are signatories, even to the point of changing the highest law of the land.

Additionally, non-delivery of services in several post-independence African countries plays an important role towards the creation of a generational

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[3] Constitutions can be manipulated, and the mere existence of a Constitution is not a sufficient ground to claim democracy in a state. Our reference to and elaboration on constitutional democracy is within the limits that political leaders seek no manipulation of their country's constitution to serve their political ambitions.

[4] The Ugandan Constitution, enacted in 1995, previously prohibited anyone younger than 35 or older than 75 from serving as president.

conflict for leadership and governance on the continent. Some studies have noted that nearly 60% of Africa's population are young people between 15 and 24 years of age (Ighobor 2017; Goal Keepers Report 2018:9) a majority of whom are not actively integrated into the economies of their respective countries. Other studies indicate that while young people comprise about 37% of Africa's labour force, they account for 60% of the unemployed on the continent (Gyimah-Brempong & Kimenyi 2013). This experience could be used to argue that the majority of young people struggle to afford basic services, given their economic situations, while those who can afford such services are scarce in many African states. It would be important to recognise that under these circumstances, the creation of a large gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' is most probable. This can lead to resentment and anger among the young people towards the OGL whom they accuse of not doing enough to address their problems. It is not surprising therefore that emerging young leaders have become outspoken about the issues affecting young people via social media and other forums, thereby strengthening their ability to challenge state authority, creating tension and exacerbating conflict for leadership and governance. This has been observed in countries such as South Africa and Uganda among others where young leaders are using their positions to gain media attention and a fast-growing base of dedicated grassroots followers. Vocal YPL such as Malema and Kyagulanyi have attracted scorn and mockery from the OGL, but at the same time they are gaining fame and popularity among the young people (Chikane 2018; Osiebe 2020). For many of the young people struggling to survive, emerging YPL seem to be a source of hope amidst frustrations, and many are beginning to question the legitimacy of a system that keeps them down.

Young people have gradually become disillusioned and embittered with voracious leaders and ineffectual governance structures on the continent. Consequently, there has been a build-up of youth activism questioning the authenticity of popular slogans such as *young people are the leaders of tomorrow as* today's experience seems to offer no guarantee for a hopeful *tomorrow*. Associating young people with 'the tomorrow' rather than 'the present' is commonly used in schools and youth gatherings as a motivational ideology to inspire young people to prepare for the future. While the ideology is inspirational to some extent, it is also political by nature. It attempts to restrict the political business 'of today' to the old generation and it seems to tactfully exclude young people from any responsibility of today's political business.

However, the evolution of young people's involvement in today's political business is ironical to the ideology.

The young people are also demanding the deconstruction of authoritarian features and bellowing for more direct input in their own governance. In Senegal for example, unemployment among young people was one of the main issues that drove the country's youths into the streets and to the voting stations to press for a change of government during the 2012 general elections, which saw the defeat of the incumbent President (Ighobor 2013). In Uganda, Kyagulanyi Ssentamu has managed to rally the youth and media behind him. He seems to offer new ideas, new horizons, new suggestions, new hopes and pro-youth ideologies. The youths back him up on all his political endeavours, and this has politically destabilized the status quo. Elsewhere in Tunisia, Mohammed Bouazizi, a young street vendor ,set himself ablaze in 2010, in a defiance demonstration against the socio-economic injustices in his country. His actions as Chloe Mulderig (2013:3) argues are widely 'recognized to have motivated the peoples of the Arab world to seek social change in the collection of demonstrations, rebellions, and armed conflicts stretching from Morocco to the Gulf'. In spite of these political revolutions led by the young generation, the existence of youth-led activism in many African countries has been misinterpreted by the OGL. It is viewed as a demonstration of irrational and obsessive behaviour that must be contained and corrected by the instruments of adult and state authority (Maclure & Denov 2006), rather than as a sign of young people's agency and of their pursuit for emancipation as an inherent and fundamental part of achieving adulthood social status with all its rights and obligations. As such, the OGL in Africa has sought to strengthen its hold on power through a number of strategies, some of which are discussed in the next section.

The Enduring Strategies of the Old Generation of Leaders

It is important to note that many African leaders who have long stayed in power were once revered as liberators and champions of democracy, irrespective of how they came to power. Some of these leaders, like the late Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of Sudan, Mobutu SeseSeko of former Zaire, and Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea assumed power by means of coups d'état, although they tried to claim identities of liberators and revolutionaries. Many of them, such as Al-Bashir, emerged on claims to reinstate the stability of their respective governments and the rule

of law. In the case of Equatorial Guinea, Nguema Mbasogo captured power amidst a deteriorating state of human rights abuse at the hands of his uncle, Francisco Macias Nguema, the then President. Nguema's new government accused the former President of dictatorship, and found him guilty of mass murder and torture (Baynham 1980:65). However, 40 years after seizing power, Nguema and his government have been linked to,

> unlawful killings by security forces; government-sanctioned kidnappings; systematic torture of prisoners and detainees by security forces; life-threatening conditions in prisons and detention facilities; impunity; arbitrary arrests, detention, and incommunicado detention (Human Rights Watch 2019).

Mohiddin (1998:4) advances an argument that many of the first generation of leaders were most interested in capturing power and assuming leadership so much so that 'for many of them, personal greed and the impulse to maintain themselves in power, and not the fulfilment of the electoral promises, influenced their vision and future'. Although Mohiddin writes more than two decades ago, his observation resonates with contemporary experiences, where the rule of law and constitutionalism have been manipulated and used as tools to legitimize oppressive regimes (Massaudo 2020).

In contemporary Africa, political leaders are used to manipulating the electorate. It seems many of them disagree with democratic practices such as a peaceful transition of power to new leaders. In 1986, when Museveni of Uganda took over the power, he opined that political leaders who overstayed their term in office were at the root of Africa's problems. Yet, his long stay in power and his attempts to justify it have succeeded in contrasting his earlier version and perception of power and political leadership. Gyaviira Kisitu (2016:3) observes that,

> in 2015 during a joint press conference, in which President Museveni and his Kenyan counterpart Uhuru Kenyatta sought to address the crucial issues facing the East African region, the Ugandan leader demonstrated a complete change of tone. He declared that 'what Africa lacks is not who [is in the leadership], but what is to be done.

Further, limits to both the presidential terms as well as the age limits

have since been scrapped from the Constitution. By successfully scrapping presidential term and age limits, Uganda joined a league of 14 other African nations that have either overturned or defied term limits in their countries (Stremlau 2016:23). In constitutional democracy, term limits have been argued to play a crucial role that entails regulating leadership succession and to counteract leaders' temptation to overstay their mandate. In countries like Namibia, Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania Senegal, Zambia, Botswana, Ghana and Mauritius, leaders have gracefully vacated office at the end of their terms. However, Uganda's case is not isolated, as similar cases have prevailed elsewhere on the continent. In Zimbabwe, the late Robert Mugabe's government held power under similar circumstances. At 93 years of age, before being ousted from power in 2017, Mugabe was Africa's oldest head of State. Mugabe, who had initially been elected Prime Minister in 1980 and seven years later became President, had been in power for 37 years. It should be noted that even though Zimbabwe had been in a socio-economic turmoil, this did not prevent the ruling ZANU PF party from endorsing Mugabe for re-election following the 2013 referendum. In Equatorial Guinea, Obiang who has been in power since 1979, made various constitutional changes (in 1982, 1991 and 2011) and has had the age limit of 75 years removed.

In other cases, the issue has not been limited to term limits but to other systems of governance such as the single-party leadership system. In such a system, multiparty democracy is repressed. A good example to this is the nature of leadership in countries such as such as Angola, Togo, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. These countries are *de facto* one-party states where political leadership rotates within the party. It suffices to claim that in such countries resignation, retirement and term limits are meaningless, since political leadership is virtually controlled by a single political party. In such a political setup, the exercise of constitutional democracy in which government institutions operate uncompromised is rare. This is because such political setups often tend to exercise absolute power with limited legitimate opposition authority, insufficient to call government to account. Experience has shown that in states that lack a proper balance of power or where political power is vested in one party or leader, cases of human rights abuse tend to be rampant. For instance, in Eswatini, formerly Swaziland, King Mswati III holds supreme executive power over the Parliament and Judiciary by virtue of a 1973 State of Emergency Decree. According to Human Rights Watch (2018) the country is engulfed in continuous abuses of freedom of association and assembly and

forced evictions. In Equatorial Guinea where the President has recently marked 40 years in power, the situation regarding human rights violations is widely noted. Amnesty International (2018) reports that 'human rights defenders and activists in Equatorial Guinea are regularly harassed, intimidated, arbitrarily arrested and detained simply for the work they do …. The rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are unduly restricted'.

In some African countries, transfer of political leadership through democratic elections has been successful. The Economic Commission for Africa (2005:22) notes that 'leadership succession and change through the electoral process, especially on a multiparty basis, are significant steps towards democratic renewal and a new culture of governance in Africa'. This has been experienced in countries such as Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Zambia, and it demonstrates trends towards emerging democratic leadership in Africa. It is important to recognize that changing leadership democratically and allowing this change to take effect peacefully is a sign of accountable leadership. It is a kind of leadership that has trust in the people who put it into office.

The rhetoric of 'free and fair' elections in several African countries has also managed to strengthen the long stay in power of some leaders. The aspect of changing political leadership in an attempt to practise democratic elections in Africa has been marred by electoral fraud and violence to some extent. The practice of justice under the principle of egalitarianism would require of leaders to respect institutions that tend to protect the wishes and rights of citizens, such as Electoral Commissions. However, some African leaders find it difficult to honour electoral laws and reforms that help to deliver free and fair elections. This has contributed to injustices, including electoral violence, in which human life and property have been destroyed. This is true, even though many African leaders seem to claim free and fair elections before media outlets and the international community. The outcome of many of these elections such as Kenya's 2007 and 2017 elections, or Zimbabwe's 2009 and 2013 presidential elections has controversially cast doubt on the interpretation and understanding of the concept 'free and fair elections' on the African continent. This is because many of the claimed free and fair elections have at the same time recorded experiences of violence targeting opposition parties, information flow obstruction and claims of flawed elections.

A common assumption implied by describing political elections as free and fair is that they serve justice as one of the ways to depict egalitarian leadership. Kisitu (2016) rightly holds that 'while the means and end of the

principle of justice are to serve a common good, it remains contestable whether the elections described as 'free and fair' are always in the interest of the masses'. Autocratic leaders have manipulated the concept for their own ends, and oftentimes institutions under their influence use the phrase insofar as the implications suit the governing authority. The phrase 'free and fair' appears ambiguously used, politicized, ritualized and at times merely uttered for the sake of it. It may not matter that an 'independent' Electoral Commission of a country can both admit that electoral violence occurred, yet at the same time declare the outcome of the same election 'free and fair' (Kisitu 2016). On the one hand, some observers may declare a certain election as a true reflection of the peoples' will while others see the same election far less of the sort. Samuel Atuobi (2008:15) argues that 'in most cases, elections declared as free and fair by some observer groups are called a sham by other observer groups'.

It is obvious that in many electoral processes little attention is given to the seemingly ritualized usage of the term 'free and fair' by the leadership in power. There is little critical reflection on questions such as,

> Is the election management body truly independent and free from the influence of the ruling party or opposition parties beyond constitu-tional provisions? Or, does the election management body have the necessary resources and capacity to deliver on its constitutional mandate? (Atuobi 2008:12).

During the 2013 presidential elections in Zimbabwe, for instance, the world received contradictory messages concerning the authenticity of the presidential election results. While the results were disputed by the main challenger, Morgan Tsvangirai, and some local observers, the same results were recognized as 'free and fair' by the African Union (AU) observers as well as the Zimbabwean Supreme Court. This played a considerable role in legitimizing the outcome of the elections in favour of the ruling party. An almost a similar experience happened in Uganda during the 2016 presidential elections. Although Museveni was the declared winner with 60,75% of the vote, significantly beating his immediate rival, Kiiza Besigye, who managed to receive 35,37% of the vote, the conditions that characterized the voting showed the use of state power to consolidate victory for the incumbent leader Museveni. The 2016 presidential elections were marred by continuous arrests of opposition leaders and restrictions on their movements. This created a space

for the incumbent to consolidate his influence with the electorate. The opposition was depicted as barbaric and lawless and therefore needed to be prevented from committing a crime. The incumbent and his camp, on the other hand, were depicted as the noble class capable of offering to the state the only genuine leadership. For many local observers, such as the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), the Inter-religious Council as well as the Elders Forum, this implied a defeat for the cause of justice and fair play (Anglican Communion News Service 2016).

The above cases are merely examples of many related experiences in African governments whose leaders have held on to power for long. These cases have a profound impact on the way how the citizens view their governments or even act towards them. Such cases have been at the forefront in influencing the young generation to challenge the existing political leadership of the old generation. They have also raised questions on how to navigate challenges facing leadership and governance on the continent. This is the point of discussion in the next section.

Navigating Challenges Facing Leaders in Governance

While the young generation seems to be rising up uncompromisingly, it is critical to remember that political leadership must be informed by a desire to serve, restoration of justice, dialogue, political tolerance, development, and all other factors leading to constitutional democracy. There is no doubt that the young generation seems determined to persuade the old generation to relinquish power at all costs. While this is true of the young generation, it can also be asked, to what extent can a complete exit of the old generation of political leaders be implemented? It is not the point of this paper to either argue for the exit of the old generation of political leaders or for the ushering in of the young generation of leaders into governance positions. However, it is the position of this paper that the conflict between these camps is real in Africa and its continuity has not helped to bring forth democratic governance, which is much desired in Africa. This conflict has limited tolerance, increased aggressive attacks from either side, while paying little attention to mitigating the challenges obscuring Africa's progress and development. In fact, as discussed earlier, the determination of the old generation of leaders to cling to power versus the aggressive approach of the young generation of leaders to undermine the old, has contributed more to perpetuating autocracy in Africa. The old generation

continuously seems to use all available mechanisms to safeguard their spaces, including a possible support of traditional philosophies associating old age with wisdom and a perception that leaders such as 'kings were believed to possess certain divine and/or supernatural powers' (Van Wyk 2007:6). Africa's long-serving leaders seem to make an appeal to such beliefs, but fall short of considering that the traditional concept of leadership in many African societies enforced accountability; and if it happened that a leader failed to serve the community appropriately, such a leader would be dethroned accordingly, irrespective of his age or the time he has spent serving (Van Wyk 2007).

It can be argued that the egalitarian model of governance is dependent on the nature of leadership envisaged and practised by incumbents. It is important to ask ourselves which model of leadership does the long serving African Heads of State follow? The understanding of leadership is varied and cannot be restricted to one model, given the diversity of societies. However, it could be argued that leadership involves the exercise of power, which may result in either good, ineffective, or destructive qualities. Given the experiences of repression and revolts in some African states, one wonders if traditional African ethos on leadership can offer any tools to mitigate today's challenges related to leadership failure on the continent. Even though we cannot speak of a generalized understanding of leadership in Africa, given the factors of time, space and people, Africans believed in leadership as a key necessity for societal posterity (Masango 2003). Good leadership guaranteed service delivery, maintenance and restoration of relationships and positive influence in society. This remains the case, even though the understanding and evolution of leadership over the years continue to be influenced by religion, politics, culture, globalization and time amongst other factors. Masango (2003:313) notes, 'in Africa a leader is viewed as someone who is servant to the clan, tribe, community or group …. People treat a leader by virtue of being a king, priest, a ruler chosen by virtue of the office in order to serve the nation'. In many African societies, high-level leadership positions and abilities have been vested in the old who are mostly expected to lead with wisdom and justice. In traditional African leadership, elders were expected not only to lead, but also to teach and delegate authority as a means of preparing future leaders. This means traditional leaders were not expected to perceive upcoming leaders as competitors, to the extent of suppressing leadership abilities of the young as often experienced in today's African politics of succession. Even though the young were equally not expected to rebel against the directions and advice of

their elders, the latter were expected to listen to the voices of their subjects and act for the good of the community. This helped those in authority to keep in touch with the challenges faced by their subjects. For instance, it was not uncommon for community members to have different opinions over a certain matter. The African leadership philosophy of *Ubuntu* would in fact recognize the varying opinions. It was upon such experiences that it emphasized values such as respect, compassion, mutual relationships and the need to recognize the 'Other', whose 'being' qualifies the essence (humaneness) of the leader on the principle that to be human is 'by recognizing the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form' (Van der Merwe 1996:76). Any problems arising from diverging voices would be settled by establishment of a consensus or agreement between parties other than dictatorship. This was due to a belief that each member's opinion was worth listening to, and respect despite the hierarchy (Ncube 2010:79; Louw 2001:19).This notion of leadership is almost non-existent, given the way leadership authority is understood and exercised from a dictatorial perspective. Van Wyk (2007:22) makes an interesting observation when she observes that many African leaders exercise leadership authority, 'often backed by coercive power' and demand unquestionable submission to a leader's 'moral authority, knowledge authority, reputational authority, issue-specific authority and affiliative authority'.

Far from an unquestionable authoritarian leadership model which seems to be detached from 'feelings' of society, a model based on an African worldview is a group phenomenon (Nahavandi 2000). Leaders in this case do not consider themselves as isolated from society, and have the authority to lead insofar as their leadership style exhibits 'interpersonal influence'. Secondly, leaders use influence to guide groups or people towards the achievements of certain goals. It is therefore important to note that the idea of 'goals-orientated' leadership discourages leadership styles built on personal interest or that which benefits a few individuals, as this does not represent the goals and aspirations of a community (Nahavandi 2000). Hierarchism as a character of leadership should not be on the basis of suppression, but on proper execution of duty while contributing effectively to the 'life of a group, tribe or community' (Masango, 2003:314). From this perspective we can speak of a leadership style that is not detached from the society. To emphasize this attachment, John Mbiti (1977:12) describes the role of leadership in pre-colonial Africa saying, 'they [leaders] formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies and rituals, they told proverbs and myths which carried religious meanings, and they

evolved laws and customs which safeguarded the life of the individual[s] and community or villagers'.

Although the above model of African heritage has undergone change, it is not lost and it can be embraced. This can be partly done by putting into practice the resolutions made from time to time by regional and continental bodies such as the African Union, East African Community, Economic Community of West African States, and the Southern Africa Development Community which attempt to offer guidelines towards the realization of democratic governance and development in Africa. These bodies advocate democracy, good governance, conflict resolutions and zero tolerance for corruption, transparency and African empowerment, amongst other calls. However, it is important for leaders to keep in mind that even though they may disregard the unwavering voices of the young generation and choose to hold on power, nature eventually takes its course with them. However, this may not be a democratic solution that Africa would want. This is because the shadow of these autocratic leaders such as economic bankruptcy, political repression, and abuse of human rights would continue to haunt the African states, even though such leaders would be long gone. A good example to illustrate this is the effect of the 1884 partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference and the subsequent declaration of colonialism in Africa. Even though this happened in 1884, it continues to have a significant effect on the formerly colonized African nations beyond the postcolonial period (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). During the colonial period, colonial governments undermined the African social fabric, economic development, and cultural progress. An African leadership model was simply used as a vehicle to install colonial administration and later dumped as non-progressive and uncivilized. The cultural fabric that held communities together and promoted cultural identities was demonized as barbaric. Even though many African countries have since been handed independence and self-determination, they are still grappling with the effects of colonialism, including but not limited to authoritarianism, exploitation, and colonial administration treaties that continue to indirectly hold African societies captive of the former colonial master (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006).

Conclusion

It has been noted that the old generation of leaders has failed to create a succession strategy that would see young people taking up higher political

leadership positions. This is a serious leadership problem. Nevertheless, the long stay in power of the OGL has not helped to respond to the challenges facing the African continent, as it has become a critical problem in itself. The highlighted cases of long-serving leaders are a good illustration of this setback. Solving this problem is key for the African continent in responding to other associated challenges such as political repression, poor socio-economic development, corruption, growing terror attacks, service non-delivery and human rights abuses, among others. A generational conflict as discussed in this paper does not seem counterproductive to solving the continent's challenges. As such, it has not been the position of this paper to endorse the young-generation-led political defiance against the old generation of leaders, but called for a return to an egalitarian leadership model informed by progressive African values that are associated with leadership values such as communitarian, service, accountability, relationship, connectedness and participation. In exercising this model of leadership, it is important for leaders and those aspiring for leadership to be informed by the contextual realities of society.

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Dr. Gyaviira Kisitu
Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy
Kyambogo University
Uganda
kisitudavis@yahooo.com

Dr. Margaret Ssebunya
Lecturer, Ethics and Human Rights
Kisubi University
Uganda
smaggie2012@gmail.com