

THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF GERONTOCRACY AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Countries in African continent have over the years suffered from the culture of gerontocracy. The limited opportunities open to the younger generation as a result of gerontocracy have affected youth empowerment. This research takes a cursory look at the concept of gerontocracy, African political make up during the pre and post colonial periods, and causes of gerontocracy as they affect youth empowerment and further gives recommendations on how to reduce this culture of political gerontology and improve the empowerment of youths. Using the method of critical analysis the researchers find out that gerontocracy can be an enriching and productive stage marked by a lifelong process of political growth and development but it is also, detrimental to youth empowerment. To this effect, the researchers recommend that politicians above the civil service year should not be allowed to hold political positions and that, youths with some level of education and exposure be given a space to participate in the politics of their country. Keywords: Gerontocracy, Youth Empowerment, Politics, Culture

Introduction

As widely argued, before colonialism, the African societies had a rich tradition of political, economic, religious and social institutions that dealt with the allocation of resources, lawmaking and social control. Traditional institutions, which are still in operation in rural Africa are complex and vary from place to place. Therefore, before the advent of colonialism, some parts of Africa had developed centralized systems of governance with *chiefs* and kings and often times the power of these rulers were restricted by various arrangements, including the institution of councils. In other cases, such as in Abyssinia and Rwanda, the rulers enjoyed more absolute power. In most of Africa countries, political tasks such as social control were not carried out solely by the state. Some of them were assigned to other organisations, based on other organizational principles, particularly to Families, Village Communities, Age sets and Religious Congregations. One of the characteristic that is commonly found among many of the decentralized African Traditional Institutions of Governance and leadership is the consensual nature of decision making in the areas of resource allocation and law-making. Most of the African traditional societies had gerontocratic system of government. Elderhood has been treated with special respect by

youth and women. In this case, patrilineal societies would have elderly men in the top position of the society as judges. Samburu community in Kenya is a good example to shed light in the leadership of elders who are males (Spencer & Spencer, 2013). In the matrilineal societies such gerontocracy is associated with women as elders and judges such as in some ethnic groups in Mozambique.(Peter, 2014a)

The foundation of Modern Democracy was laid during the European Enlightenment, an 18th Century Philosophic Movement. This was championed by John Locke who is frequently called the father of Modern Democracy for his Political Theory which he developed in his *Two Treaties of Civil Government*. The political philosophy which Locke developed in his work is highly democratic and had much influence on English Politics and also on the American

Constitution. The relationship between the ruler and the ruled he proposes is of more democratic and independent than any other theories given before him. He believes in equality of men, the consent of the majority, the division of power and the right to rebellion. (Onebunne citing John Locke, 2017).

The Igbo's, however, operated a decentralized political system. Many institutions were put in place and political authority was shared among members of the community. For example, the *Ofo* title holders [Council of elders], *Ozo* title holders, age grades etc were all involved in the power –sharing exercises. No wonder the *acephalous* was ascribed to the political organization of the Igbo political system. Igbo political system seems to be *headless* after the popular saying that *Igbo enwe eze*. (Dibie, 1999). Therefore, using the Igbo traditional system, we clearly see the inter-play of politics and law, the structure of the Igbo political system.

In Igbo society, power belongs to the people. The Igbo society believe in the politics of *Ohacracy* which is the government of the Igbo people, by the Igbo people regardless of the status and for the common good of the Igbo nation in general. (Onebunne, 2017). *Ohazurume* is equally administered accordingly in the context of *Ohacracy* and in this form of political administration of power, the Igbo society or nation knows that in political leadership, power belongs to the people. *Ohazurume* is the expressive political nitty-gritty of *Ohacracy*. *Ohazurume* nonetheless spells out the consensus action of the people which is a very definitive leadership style that is synonymous with *Ohacracy*. *Ohazurume*, notwithstanding, is the microcosm of any styled leadership is based on consensus. Hence, the Leadership Series of *Ekwe Nche Research Institute* has it that: “in Igbo society, power belongs to the people. *Ndi Igbo* elect their own leaders and tell their leaders what to do and how to lead them...” this political system is no longer the same in our present African society as leaders are elected into office even without the consent and votes of her citizen especially the youths. According to Umeogu (2007), “*Ohazurume* is a principle governing thought, as well as a practice governing conducts, in relation by which people, by democracy of action , take care of the affairs of life” (pp.107-109). *Ohazurume* is a participatory form of government in Igbo land where everybody expresses his own views. As a property of Igbo government, Umeogu (2007) insinuated that it is a philosophy of life and action, a philosophy of *Ohacracy*, a philosophy of the government of everybody, by everybody and for everybody. This type of government was evidently seen in 507B.C in the Greek world when the Athenian Leader Cleisthenes introduced a system of political reform he called *Demokratia* or rule by the people *Ndigbo* elect their own leaders and tell them what to do and how to lead them. *Ndigbo*

have never accepted *rulers*, not even when the British imposed warrant chiefs on them. Describing the political philosophy and organization of *Ndigbo*, Cronji (1992) in his book 'the world and Nigeria' stated as follows:

"In the east indirect rule failed altogether. There were no Igbo chiefs, emirates or empires, which could be adapted to the administration of the British. The Eastern people lived in village groups administered by councils which were presided over by senior men who held office by virtue of their personal ability as much as by age or lineage" (Cronji, 1972)

African society before the advent of the colonial masters had a political structure which was a government by the aged, that is, the senior men. The aged were said to know a lot of things which the younger once did not know. Age which guarantees experiences was associated with the needed wisdom. It was generally believed that what the old sees sitting, no matter the experience of the young, they cannot see it. Knowledge is acquired as we grow older. For instance, The Igbo political organization was independent. The smallest unit was called the *eberezi*, *ebe* or the *ezi* which was composed of the monogamous nuclear family, the second is the *Onuama* who are descendant of the same grand-father. It is at this level, *Onuama* that political power started to raise its head above the nuclear family level and the *Onuama* had a political head called *Onye-isi-Onuama* (head of the *Onuama*) which was the most elderly man of the *Onuama*. The *Onye-isi-Onuama* presided over the regulation of disputes such as matrimonial or interpersonal disputes in the *Onuama*. The last unit was the political grade of the *Ndi Ama Ala* (Council of Elders) composed of all the *Elders* of the lineages (*Umunna*) of the village. One striking thing about all these units is the fact that they are all headed by the eldest in each unit. To this effect, we can deduce that the concept of gerontocracy is a life-long phenomena. It is a culture that has been in existence before independence, after independence and even in our contemporary African society. African culture of gerontocracy will keep being in existence if youths are not integrated into the political affairs of the African society. The option of gerontocracy renders the Youth's redundancy and often irresponsible thereof contributes nothing meaningful for the society at large.

The Concept of Gerontocracy

Wikipedia sees gerontology as the study of the social, cultural, psychological, cognitive and biological aspect of aging. Gerontocracy is defined as a rule of elders; gerontocracy was a form of social organization in which a group of old men or a Council of Elders dominate decisions by exercising some form of control (Webster, 1990:p.514). The etymology of the term gerontocracy originates from the Greek language *gerousia* meaning elder. Elder has the connotation of leadership, social status, merit, and wisdom, other than old age in the ancient civilizations. Gerontocracy is the rule by elders or a type of government that associates leadership with elders. The same concept of leadership by elders has been cleverly traced to the Roman, British and the Church Civilizations by Historians. Each civilization has a particular meaning to the status of elder. In this case, the age factor is trivial and does not qualify one to be an elder in such cases. It is wisdom, experience, knowledge, and righteousness that graduate one to be considered an elder.

In the context of the African customary law, the term elder is rationally associated to wisdom meaning, a person with specially attributes such as a thinker in the same Aristotelian concept of *philosopher-king* Murungi (2013). Such wise elder does not necessarily make reference to

old age or grey hair but amount of knowledge and wisdom one proves to have. Old age, however, contributes more to this claim. In the post-Independent African society, gerontocracy in the political sense has become notorious as some elders cling on power to dominate and favour their next of kin. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is an example in which the leader sees his status as elder to be the reason to cling onto power. The late Muammar Ghaddafi did the same in Libya, President Paul Biye of Cameroon, and the late President Eyadema of Togo did the same. Elders in Political Leadership in Africa have been associated with quest or hunger for power other than wisdom. Gerontocracy has more to do with the *ageism* in a social set-up and wisdom necessary for Political Leadership in society. Africans in traditional societies attached wisdom of leadership to the aged against the youth putting claims on wisdom and experience. Gerousia comes from the ancient Greece meaning a group of old people forming a Senate of wise men. (Boule ancient Greece, 2014)

According to Merriam Websters Dictionary, Gerontocracy is rule by elders; specifically: a form of social organization in which a group of old men or a council of elders dominates or exercises control. Gerontocracy is the rule by elders and it is opposed to rule by the youths, *Juvenocracy*, or *Youthocracy*. In African socio-political thought, Gerontocracy is a political system, a form of *Oligarchical* rule, whereby a small group of elderly individuals are in control of power. . This belief and practice is strongly rooted in the popular saying as buttressed by Okoduwa (2003) that “what an old man sees while sitting down, a young man cannot see even while standing.

According to Sefa Dei (1994), gerontocracy is “the traditional African respect for the authority of elderly persons for their wisdom, knowledge of community affairs, and ‘closeness’ to the ancestors” . Sefa Dei adds that there is in Africa a general belief that “old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world.”

Gerontocracy is a form of oligarchic rule in which an entity is ruled by leaders who are significantly older than most of the adult population. The ancient Greece was among the first to believe in this gerontocratic idea of gerontocracies, as famously stated by Plato, "it is for the elder man to rule and for the younger to submit". However, these beliefs are not unique to ancient Greece, as many cultures still subscribe to this way of thinking. Often, these political structures are such that political power within the ruling class accumulates with age, making the oldest the holders of power. Hence, in a gerontocratic society, power, wealth and prestige flow upwards within an age pyramid. African societies have been known for their gerontocratic nature. In communities, the elders are treated with respect and reverence. Age, most times, seems to be a prerequisite to assuming certain roles and authority positions, because it is believed that youthfulness and strength are like pinch of salt when compared to experience and wisdom. This trend is replicated in all facets of the African reality, as it is eldest, not the brightest is expected to lead the way. In African political institutions, age once again determines the allocation of duties, responsibilities and functions. An example can be seen by the *Esan* tribe of Edo State in the Eastern part of Nigeria where elders rule. In *Esan*, elders exercised a general control over the people. According to Okojie (1960:7) the laws that governed *Esan* communities were based on the customs and traditions of the people, which the elders were the main repositories of power. More so, the head of the extended family unit was called *Omijiogbe*. In the traditional Igbo societies, this is exemplified in the different roles one assumes when in different age grades. You might see gerontocracy in a tribe where elders are esteemed for the perspective and wisdom they have acquired.

The African culture is full of symbols and symbolism. And Igbo culture is not an exception. *Ofo*, which is the symbol of authority, plays important role in *Ohacracy*. *Ofo* symbolizes authority and truthfulness and anyone who upholds *Ofo* must let justice prevail in all cases but this is also exclusively reserved for elders, thereby reducing the chances of young once from having a good knowledge of what goes on in the political environment. (Alike, 2016) posit that

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“Symbolism derives its power from the fact that it speaks not only of reflective intelligence but to the entire human psyche. It arouses deep emotional experience, releases hidden energies in the soul, gives meaning and stability to the personality, establishes strong loyalties and disposes a man for consistent and committed action. Symbols in Igbo land can be seen in Igba-afa (divination), morning kola ritual, Ichi-ozo (title taking), bride price ceremony, masquerade ceremonies, etc.”

This has split over to contemporary times, as most of African leaders who are mostly grandfathers assume important political positions. Researchers have shown that the average age of the African president is 70 while our contemporaries cross globe have theirs between 50-55 years. Paul Biya of Cameroon (70), Santos of Angola (68), Ellen Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia (75), Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (87), Jacob Zuma of South Africa (69), Musveni of Uganda (66). There are very few African leaders under 65, and fewer under 60. In the African society, there is a correlation between age and effective leadership; it may be safe to assume that African leadership is in dire consequences given the current state of the continent. The continent today is a catalogue of conflicts, strife, poverty, diseases and underdevelopment. The continent has been playing catch up with other continents for centuries and her leaders who are meant to be ‘wise, given their ages even partner with foreigners to exploit and oppress its people. The African leadership is characterized by democratic monarchy, tyranny and sit-tight despots, who manipulate the constitution at will. In the immutable words of Peter Obi (2017), our leadership has great problems as a result of *accumulated leadership failure*. But for him, *our worst problem is the acceptance by the Youths of this generation that this failed system of leadership is the norm*. Obi, in an interactive session during the Youth’s Forum, on July 27, 2017, addressed the Youth thus:

We have all failed you as leaders. You should rise up and take your country back. This impunity all over the places should not continue. It is your resources, your money. Don’t sit back and allow them mismanage it and land you into recession. We have no reason whatsoever to be in this mess.

It may be possible therefore to consider Nigerian polity as failure with litany of Old people recycling old and out modelled leadership. It may be considered politically sound to describe the form of government in Nigeria today as *gerontocratic* which is government dominated by old and elderly people with the young population submitting to that order. If we want to expand the scope of the form of government in Nigeria, we may describe it as *diarchy* where two forms of government are operational. We are simultaneously running gerontocracy which is government by the old people and democracy which is the exercise of government power through the peoples elected representatives. This is not the first time *diarchy* was practiced in Nigeria's political landscape. During the botched third republic, Nigeria combined democracy with military government. At the centre were a military President and the National Assembly

whose members were elected by the people. At the state level were elected Governors and elected members of various House of Assembly. The clash between democratic and military forces could not sustain the third republic. The relief for Nigerians was that the diarchy was imposed on them by the Military Junta in power. There is no way two contradictory forms of government will sustain any political system. This is why Nigerians should be vigilant with the *gerontocratic* forces ravaging our growing democracy. What we are seeing every where is the prevalence and recycling of old people and the perpetration of old and retrogressive policies that are antithetical to democracy and modernization. Instead of developing sound vision that will propel us into the future, they are always making references to antiquated, out-fashioned and anachronistic past. Visionary policies and programmes to propel us into bright and prosperous future have been jettisoned and new ones are not in place. The *gerontocrats* are characterised by rigidity, intransigence, uncompromising stand, unforgiveness, past glories and living in the past. The *gerontocrats* are good examples of the psychological theory of characterisation by value where an individual can never change to new ways of life and realities of time. The quagmire galaxy of confusion that has engulfed most African countries and overheating Nigeria's polity for instance can be traceable to the rigidity, uncompromising and unforgiving stand of the country's political godfathers who bestride themselves as demi-gods and it is either their wishes are done or the country becomes ungovernable and *hell-let-loose* on everybody in the country.

In line with the understanding of Weber (2009), African Customary law has had a special recognition for leadership by elders who are its interpreters, custodians and eventually enforcers. As such, customary law is founded within the oral traditions which Weber admits may not necessarily be irrational but fundamentally necessary for the proper running of any political society. The democracy that most African countries preach today is what can be referred to as *Ohacracy* in the Igbo political system According to (Iroegbu, 1997):

The practical conception of political order and governance in which the communities determine the praxis of the socio-political life of the people while taking into account basic individual and group peculiarities.

By this definition, *Ohacracy* is an active participation of all responsible Igbo persons and by extension, all African irrespective of age, gender in the polity which promotes the common good and common goal in their existential life so that they can define and establish themselves and stand out as men in the society.

Youth Empowerment

According to Wikipedia, Youth Empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. They do this by addressing their situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes. Youth empowerment aims at improving quality of life. For Africans to get the Youths Empowered is for them to embrace the concept of belongingness. The notion of belongingness overshadows the existential facts of every communal operation. Belongingness is clearly reflected in John Donne's poem:

No man is an Island, entirely of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and

*therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls
for thee. (Donne, "No man is an Island," 1624).*

Iroegbu (1994: 374-380) opined that "belongingness holds that our existence as human beings, as well as our integral participation in the society in which we find ourselves, are to be defined by our being given the sense and substance of belonging." This, however, leads to a kind of solidarity or harmony. This form of Solidarity of belongingness in whatever form is in the manner which things exist and relate in existential reality. According to Iroegbu (1996:78-87), "belongingness is derived from the basic sense of unity (community) that exists among the members of the given political community." For him therefore, belongingness is the African metaphysics of To Be. The Youth nevertheless must belong with attendant duties and rights. Youth Empowerment entails that the youth must have belonged and participated fully within a community. The community therefore guarantees this relational operation and mere interaction. It is in the community as the locus of operation that the youth who belongs renders a kind of community services of which as a good follower, leadership is of paramount importance. Youth empowerment is achieved through participation in youth empowerment programs. However scholars argue that children's rights implementation should go beyond learning about formal rights and procedures to give birth to a concrete experience of rights. Silencing the youths which Amaro (2001) sees as the systematic exclusion of the life experiences and viewpoints of marginalized people in popular culture. Applying this definition, Griffin, (2002: Lesko, 1996; Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001) were of the succinct opinion that young people can be described as a marginalized population due to lack of power and voice in adolescent discourse and mainstream culture. A variety of Youth Empowerment initiatives are underway around the world. These programs can be through non-profit organizations, government organizations, schools or private organizations.

Youth Empowerment is different from Youth Development because development is centred on developing individuals, while empowerment is focused on creating greater community change or opportunity through the development of individual capacity. Empowerment movements, including youth empowerment, originate, gain momentum, become viable, and become institutionalized. Youth empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Activities may focus on Youth-Led Media, Youth Rights, Youth Councils, Youth Activism, Youth Involvement in community decisionmaking, and other methods. Also, there should be political liberty where youths are given equal opportunity to not only exercise their franchise but also join any political party of the interest. Laski (1980:142) sees liberty as the eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which men have the opportunity to be their best selves.

Across Africa, millions of boys and girls are still out of school, which dramatically reduces their chance at realizing their potential in increasingly urbanizing and formalizing economies. Simultaneously, millions of young people come of working age each year, with low prospects of finding one. Although, African leaders have recognized the urgency of investing in Africa's youths to ensure they are productive agents of their growing economies, and have articulated the African union 2017 road map around that theme. But beyond policy, governments will need to work closely with the private sector, multilateral organizations and civil society to scale up the things that work, and make that agenda a reality. Aside these programs put in place by the government, *Ohazurueme* which is a total involvement of every member of the society in *Ohacracy* must be encouraged. *Ohacracy* is a form of government of the people that is characterized by common consensus for the good of everybody, which is

embedded in unity, love, and progress hence, “*Igwe-bu-ike*,” meaning unity is strength. (Onebunne, 2017). This is what the African political society needs to get rid of the culture of gerontocracy and ensure equal participation of all her citizens. *Ohacracy* is made up of people with integrity and so should African political leaders be. Despite these programs by the government, the youths have been relegated to a position of servant hood. Many years after many African countries gained their independence and embraced the western civilization, politics is still practiced under the precolonial political point of view.

Types of Empowerment

Youth empowerment involves different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their life style. According to Jimba (2006), Youth Empowerment means a way of inculcating into the youths, the spirit of transformation of ideas into creativeness.

Youth empowerment can be viewed from different dimensions: political, psychological, community, organizational, economic, social and cultural. Political empowerment is aimed at improving equal participation of the youths in politics. Psychological empowerment enhances individual's consciousness, belief in self-efficacy, awareness and knowledge of problems and solutions and of how individuals can address problems that harm their quality of life. This dimension aims to create self-confidence and give youth the skills to acquire knowledge. Community empowerment focuses on enhancing the community through leadership development, improving communication, and creating a network of support to mobilize the community to address concerns. Organizational empowerment aims to create a base of resources for a community, including voluntary organizations, unions and association that aim to protect, promote and advocate for the powerless. Economic empowerment teaches entrepreneurial skills, how to take ownership of their assets and how to have income security. Social empowerment teaches youth about social inclusion and literacy as well as helping kids find the resources to be proactive in their communities. Cultural empowerment aims to recreate cultural practices and redefine cultural rules and norms for youth. Through these dimensions of empowerment, programs can be put in place on empowering youth many aspects of their lives.

Usefulness of Youth Empowerment

Empowerment according to Kogi State Government (2004) is a way of changing the attitude and potentials of individual's to positively re-direct them to gain control over their life or situation they are in. This involves making individuals to create and produce goods and services that will help them economically. An empowered youth stands the chance of succeeding in his society unlike those who lack such opportunity. Empowerment can be carried out by self or sponsored. Be it sponsored or self-empowerment, support is very important as it “beautifies” the youths and their countries at large. Political empowerment of the youth can therefore never be overemphasized.

The youths need to be given a voice in our political system. A few researchers, however, are beginning to recognize the need to seek youth perspective in order to fully understand the adolescent experience. For example, Finn (2001: 186), in her critique of adolescent social service, question, “[w]here are the voices of the young people themselves...”. Equally, Bradley, Deighton & Selby, 2004; Mandel & Qazilbash, 2005) assert that obtaining young peoples' perspective is necessary because the social position of adults limit what they can purport to know about youth. Furthermore, Morrill (2000) argues that to legitimately

comprehend a particular articulation of youth culture, researchers must meet the youth in the spaces where young people make and have their lives constructed by adults on a daily basis. Youth empowerment is of good importance to both nations and the empowered. With youth empowerment, the future prosperity of nations is secured because these are the people that are, and will take care of many offices and functions in the country. There are also those who are going to manage top offices in the future in accordance with the popular statement “the youths are the leaders of tomorrow”. The importance of youth empowerment is so many that all of them cannot be detailed out in this write-up.

When the young are empowered, the society becomes a good place for all to live. They will assist in the political and economic activities of the society where they find themselves. And in turn, both families and the entire nation benefits. This is in line with the words of Brandee McHale, president of the Citi Foundation and Director of Corporate Citizenship at Citi who once stated on Forbes, "When young people don't see or have a sustainable economic and political path, our families and communities also suffer. In fact, the futures of cities are intrinsically tied to the economic and political success of young people"

In line with the above view, Ogbe (1996) stated that wealth creation acquired through youth empowerment is expected to reverse the structural weakness and imbalances in the economy by providing strategic focus and direction and inculcating in the youths the right ethics, discipline, values, hard work, honesty, respect and humility among others. Good governance is attainable with youth empowerment. An empowered youth stands to empower the masses. Any youth who was empowered in his time of hardship will lead his people through the right path. Any youth empowered on leadership skill will do well in leadership positions. This is because he has been trained on how to lead people. He applies what he learned and makes his governance acceptable to the citizens.

More so, youth empowerment leads to crime reduction in the society. Crime is an offensive act against individuals or states. Many people indulge in 'dirty' businesses because they lack empowerment when they were youths. . Many youths take part in illegal activities because they are not empowered morally, academically, politically as well as financially. Example, when youths are taught well on the danger and punishments behind armed robbery or dealing in drugs, there is every possibility that they will not take part in them. They do everything possible to see that they meet up with the demand of the society. Also, a well-empowered youth on leadership skill gives “first class” rule to his nation. With youth empowerment on leadership, embezzlement of public fund by top governing officers becomes a history. The security departments of many nations have the youth as the larger number. This is because the youths are full of energy and ability. Standard security jobs are made for the youths and not the weak old men. This should also apply to occupying political positions because the youths are always ready to confront challenges. Helgeson & Schneider (2015) suggests, however, that “it is clear from the current political and social landscape that youth today crave recognition as equal contributions in shaping a just society”.

Age-Advantage in Democratic Leadership

Age grading has a lot to do with progress and development. The role that age plays in ensuring an effective democratic leadership can never be over emphasized. Age as a factor for determining an effective and a competent leader can also encourage the progress and development of any country. New research suggests that there may be a reason for the age disparities between leaders at various age brackets. A team of psychologists led by Brian .R.

Spisaka of VU University of Amsterdam provides an evidence in their research that younger leaders can be seen to be more innovative than older leaders. It is believed that the younger leaders can also facilitate change unlike the older leaders who are believed to maintain stability during financially difficult times. In a research published in *The Leadership Quarterly*, the participants preferred younger candidates as leaders for policies promoting renewable resources. More so, Babatunde (2015) streamlined the advantages of young leaders over their older counterparts follows: *Younger leaders embrace change and exhibit great skills at marketing their new ideas. They have the courage to make difficult changes, possibly because of their lack of experience which make them more optimistic about their proposal for change. They are also inspiring.* Young people are well equipped by age bracket to take risk. As Babatunde (2015) reiterated: “their older colleagues tend to lead by *pushing* while younger managers lead by *pulling*”. The younger leaders are also more dedicated to continuous improvement, open to dialogue and are receptive of feedbacks.

Effects of Gerontocracy on Youth Empowerment

There is strong evidence that the participation of young people in formal, institutional political processes is relatively low when compared to older citizens across the globe. This challenges the representativeness of the political system and leads to the disenfranchisement of young people. An electorate which includes a growing number of older people generates new imbalances in terms of voters’ turnout, voters’ registration, party support and the social and generational composition of the legislature. Urgent political scrutiny is required to avoid making generational inequalities worse. We ought to kick-start a debate about the political, as well as economic, implications of imbalances between the gerontocrats and the youths’ involvement in all sectors of the economy. Looking at democracy through a generational lens, one will undoubtedly have its limitations, since this is only one of the dimension identities that affect our lives as citizens. But ignoring the ever more apparent inequalities associated with demographic change is no longer a viable option. We need to ascertain and address the reasons for the alienation of many young people from our political system.

There is, it seems, a longstanding paternalistic attitude towards the political representation of young people not just in Africa but other parts of the world. But Brennan and Barnett (2009) reiterate “when youth become engaged in community activities they develop the skill needed to be an effective leader.” In 2011, UK’s public health minister Anne Milton advised that people under the age 45 should not enter politics. The comment gained attention because the Prime Minister was, at the time, aged 44 –but it perhaps speaks more widely to the perception that the possession of life experience based solely on age matters more than each individual’s right to contribute to the democratic perspective based on their own judgement and values.

As Furlong and Cartmel argued “when issues emerge that have a core relevance for young people, they are often tackled from a paternalistic and condescending ‘we know what’s best for you’ perspective or are addressed in ways that prioritise the interests of older generations. Hence, the debate about student finance was framed from an older tax payer, rather than from a contemporary consumer, perspective; discussion of the national debt crisis rarely addresses the immediate impact of reducing public spending on youth jobs or training; while unemployment policy tends to focus not so much on creating opportunities, but on tackling a perceived skill deficit and motivating young people who are presented as feckless and even as ‘inadequate citizens’”.

The effects of Gerontocracy on Youth Empowerment

There are many effects of gerontocracy on the Youth. Firstly, gerontocracy renders the youths politically inactive and unproductive. With majority of youths being ignorant of the happenings in the country, these *gerontocrats* relegate the youths to position of being almost unnoticed and their impacts not felt. Bills that are meant to stimulate youth empowerment are trodden underfoot by the elderly who occupy all political seats both at the Federal, State and Local Government level. Recently the Nigerian Senate just reviewed and considered 33 BILLS from the report of the committee on Constitution Review and one of the bills is Bill 27: Reduction of Age for Election, that passed the senate vote of which 86 voted *For*, while 10 voted *Against* and 1 person abstained himself. From Independent Newspaper of July 27, 2017, we read thus:

The bill seeking to set timelines for determination of election disputes also scaled through as senators voted 97 in support. Another amendment proposed on age qualification by altering sections 65, 106, 131, and 177 of the constitution to reduce the age of qualification for offices of the president, governors, senate and members of the House of Representatives also got full endorsements of the Senate. With the passage, anyone who has attained the age of 25 years can contest election into state House of Assembly as well as the House of Representatives while anyone who is 35 years old can contest into the office of the president as well as the Senate

When France in 2017 voted a young man, Emmanuel Macron of 39 years as her President, Nigeria is still considering 35years of age for the same position while the incumbent president, Muhammad Buhari is 74years. The truth is that the logistics to produce a young president in Nigeria in near future is not yet in place. Will the political cabals allow such?

The youths have lost confidence in the government because of the ‘close door’ politics practiced, where the youths are not kept abreast with the mandates of the government and are faced with unfulfilled promises and false propaganda. These have affected the resourcefulness of the youths.

Secondly, gerontocracy reduces the opportunity of the youths to acquire useful political knowledge. For this reason, mounting some political positions on youth may be difficult because though they have the capability, they lack the wisdom and knowledge to rule. They are not exposed to the nitty-gritty of politics.

Complementing the Political Gerontologic Participation and Youth Empowerment

People under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. In some countries, eligibility for the national parliament starts at 25 years or higher and it is common practice to refer to politicians as ‘young’ if they are below 35-40 years of age. The youths are not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes such as Parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administrations. In order to respond to the needs of young people, and to guarantee that their basic human rights are recognized and enforced, young people’s active and meaningful participation in their societies and in democratic practices and processes is of crucial importance. Meaningful youth participation and leadership require that young people and young people-led organizations have opportunities, capacities, and benefit from an enabling environment and relevant evidence-based programmes and policies at all levels. Realizing young people’s right to participate and be

included in democratic processes and practices is also vital to ensure the achievement of internationally agreed development goals and to refresh the development agenda. The young people need to be included in decision making and their opinions sort.

Recommendations

For the purpose of this study, I recommend the following,

1. Those politicians above the civil service year should not be allowed to hold political posts. This is to allow the youths the opportunity to assume political offices and man the affairs of her country.
2. That the old should only play advisory roles and stand as watch-dogs to check mate the activities of the younger ones.
3. That necessary training be organized to enlighten the upcoming generation about the politics of her country including the requirements to hold political post.
4. That the youths with some level of education and exposure be given a space to participate in the politics of her country.
5. That every African country should adopt the traditional pattern where the council of elders moderate and share responsibilities to different groups to ensure a continuous running of all sectors of the country's economy.
6. To qualify, for governorship and representatives at the national level one must hold a minimum of a first degree (bachelors) with good professional competence to be able to meet to the standard of the international community.
7. Some percentage of national and state representation at the house should be given to youths.
8. There should be political liberty where youths are given equal opportunity to not only exercise their franchise but also join any political party of their interest. Laski (1980:142) sees liberty as the eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which men have the opportunity to be their best selves.

Conclusion

Most of us breathe in political air, polluted by corruption and mis-management. This bad air can be traced to the domination of the political seats by some set of old and elderly people who can be called *gerontocrats*. To activate youth participation, what we need to do is to make them realize that every single aspect of their life is influenced by politics. By being unaware of politics, our fates are decided by somebody else. In this stage too, we have to change their perceptions on politics. Politics can be cool. Politics can be fun. Politics is not a difficult thing to do. Not all of us should be politicians, but all of us should be aware of it and participate in deciding our own destinies, because man they say is a political animal. Many young people who are aware of politics are having a skeptic perspective. "Even though I know that politics is important, I have no power to influence it. I am nobody." Thus, the next step is to make them believe that they can make a difference.

The youths need to be taught what 'real politics' is and should be by explaining the political system and how it works: how a legislation was made, how political officials are elected, how the budget was proposed and accepted and how we can influence decision making. This paper does advocate a total displacement of the *geroncrats* but the old should be made to play advisory roles and should relegate political functions and decision makings roles to the younger generation.

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