Chapter 3
Youth Participation in Anglophone Africa

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'Only by tapping into the biggest asset we have – our youth can we create a much better world for everyone' Jayathma Wickramanayake,
United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, 2017-2022

Africa is the continent of the young. According to the African Union (2017: iii), about 65 per cent of the total population of Africa is currently between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Moreover, Africa is the only continent globally where the youth population is growing significantly. By 2050, the number of Africans under 24 years old will have increased by nearly 50 per cent. The continent will have the largest number of young people, making up nearly twice the young population of the whole of South Asia and Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania (Sow 2018).

In real terms, these huge numbers, coupled with the dynamism, innovation and energy that tend to characterise young people, make the African youth not only a potential force to be reckoned with in wider politics, but it also makes their policy contribution absolutely crucial. Paalo (2017: 2) argues that it is therefore essential that a variety of political stakeholders internationally, regionally and nationally, recognise the indispensable role of the youth as agents of change and partners in development by providing the necessary access and support.

The above sentiment is increasingly being recognised, but many scholarly accounts on youth participation in Africa have tended to be either extreme or pessimistic in their account (Resnick and Casale 2011: 1). For example, Kaplan (1996: 16) refers to Africa's youth as 'out-of-school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite'. Youth have also frequently been described as 'lacking in political awareness, show(ing) political apathy, and (being) disinterested in politics and lacking in political participation' (Ntsabane and Tau 2016: 60). Ngcongco (1989) notes that in traditional African society, groups such as women and young people were not expected to be leaders. Political power was based on age and was centred on a person's social standing.

The youth may not have been considered mature enough to contest for political leadership, however, this has not precluded their involvement in public affairs, albeit often to their disadvantage. History is peppered with examples of youth being exploited and manipulated by leaders. In the colonial era, for example, nationalist leaders in Ghana's independence movement mobilised disaffected youth to support their cause, notably, the 'verandah boys'[1] who rallied to Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party in the 1950s (Austin 1964: 77). Following this tradition, African leaders have since continued to foster attachments with the youth for their own purposes and have often encouraged them to engage in violent behaviour in the name of furthering their political causes. Collier (2007) argues that young African males in particular may potentially be mobilised as soldiers in civil conflict.

In Anglophone Africa, the above argument seems to be evident. In 1960s Malawi, President Hastings Banda established the Young Pioneers from the youth wing of the Malawi Congress Party who then became enforcers of Banda's regime, effectively terrorising pro-democracy activists (Roessler 2005: 220). In another example, former Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi used the social movement-come-criminal gang, the Mungiki, in Kenya's 2002 general elections to garner support. Composed predominantly of urban youth from Nairobi's slums, the Mungiki exploited a cocktail of violence, extortion, and generational conflict to encourage voter support of Moi's successor, Uhuru Kenyatta (Kagwanja 2005). A commission of enquiry into Kenya's highly contested 2007 elections, in which over a thousand people were killed, found evidence that political parties and business leaders had co-opted young people to orchestrate parts of the post-election violence (Centre for Strategic and International Studies 2009). In Ghana, while youth wings are meant to 'contribute positively to democratic consolidation through peaceful and democratic activities with their mother parties, they mostly rather engage in aggressive, violent politics (including, vandalising public property, rioting/violent protests, seize and control over facilities of public good, militias/vigilantism and electoral violence), annulling the expectation of constructive contribution from the demographic majority in the continent' (Paalo 2017: 1). In Nigeria, youth have often been excluded or side-lined from politics, or, if they have been involved, they are 'mainly misused and abused to achieve the inordinate and perverse political ambition of the norm less, lawless and selfish section of the Nigerian political class' (Inokoba and Maliki 2011: 2017).

While youth exploitation has been and continues to be a characteristic of political affairs in Anglophone Africa, concomitantly, robust youth activism has also been a persistent feature.

1 So called because these youth slept outside on verandas, rather than having homes of their own.

Student activists played a role in anti-colonial nationalism in the mid-twentieth century and after independence generations of university goers mobilised for change, demanding that politics and education be decolonised, transformed and africanised. Anti-structural adjustment and democratisation protests followed in the 1980s and more recently in the 'Fallist' movement in South Africa (See Bohler-Muller and van der Merwe 2011; Nyamnjoh 2016; Booysen 2016; Heffernan et al. 2016). A 2016 Afrobarometer report found that youth continue to be at the forefront of political change across Africa, driven by frustration over high levels of unemployment, marginalisation and a feeling of 'voicelessness' and underrepresentation by their governments (Moyo 2016: 5).

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the legislation in place across the Anglophone African states that promotes youth participation as well as the de facto conventional and non-conventional avenues the youth increasingly use to participate. Before this can unfold, it is necessary to define what we mean by 'youth' in Africa.

Who are the 'youth' in Anglophone Africa?

There is no single definition of 'youth'. Some scholars argue that this demographic is fairly difficult to define given that 'young people are not a fixed category, neither historically, politically, culturally, socially nor personally' and that not only are young people in transition, but youth itself is a transitional construct (Richter and Panday 2007: 294; Jones 2009; Utas 2012). For the purposes of this chapter, an age-based definition is used. The AU's official definition of 'youth' is individuals between 15-35 years of age (African Union 2006).

Table 1: Definitions of 'youth' across Anglophone Africa

	Age group
Botswana	15-35
Ghana	15-35
Kenya	15-30
Malawi	10-35
Nigeria	18-35
South Africa	14-35
Tanzania	15-35
Uganda	18-30
Zambia	15-35
Zimbabwe	15-35

From the table above, of the ten Anglophone countries, Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe prescribe to the AU definition. In Kenya, the youth are defined as between 15 and 30 years. Malawi's parameters are much broader than the rest of the Anglophone states, with their youth policy defining youth as 'all persons from age 10 to 35 years regardless of their sex, race, education, culture, religion, economic, marital and physical status'. Nigeria classifies youth as 18-35 years old, South Africa, 14-35, and Uganda 18-30.

Table 2: National youth population by age and per cent, 2019

	Population size	15-24 years In numbers (percentage of population)	15-29 years
Botswana	2 283 255	422 311 (18.5)	622 440 (27.3)
Ghana	28 715 894	5 347 565 (18.6)	7 566 077 (26.3)
Kenya	49 142 516	9 898 568 (20.1)	13 886 600 (28.3)
Malawi	20 509 317	4 217 763 (20.6)	5 758 647 (28.1)
Nigeria	208 679 114	41 867 094 (20.1)	56 923 684 (27.3)
South Africa	55 918 443	9 494 404 (17)	14 751 993 (26.4)
Tanzania	56 985 045	11 517 008 (20.2)	15 839 174 (27.8)
Uganda	42 169 690	8 849 580 (21)	12 210 126 (29)
Zambia	16 929 953	3 387 922 (20)	4 677 804 (27.6)
Zimbabwe	14 277 281	2 896 764 (20.3)	4 161 814 (29.1)

Source: United States Census Bureau 2019

Anglophone Africa is young. Based on US Census Bureau statistics for 2019[2] across Anglophone Africa (see Table 2), 20 per cent of the population is aged 15 to 24 years. This increases to over a quarter (28 per cent) of the population if one takes the age group up to 29 years. The number increases still further when taking into consideration the 35-year age limit for 'youth'. For example, Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics (2018), estimates that in 2015/2016, the youth aged '18 to 34' years constituted 35 per cent of the total population. Zambia's youth constitute 36.7 per cent of the total national population (Zambia National Youth Policy 2015: 2), and young people between the ages of 15 to 34 years make up 35.7 per cent of South Africa's population (StatsSA 2019a). Malawi's 2018 census reveals a mostly youthful population with a median age of 17 years (Malawi Population and Housing Census Report 2018: 16). Tanzania too is mostly youthful, also with a median age of 17.7 years (World Population Review 2019).

2 The US Census Bureau does not provide data on the specific youth category: 15-35 years.

Youth participation in Africa: declarations, instruments and policy frameworks

In most definitions of democracy, political participation is identified as a core principle (see, for example, Dahl 1971; 1989: 88; Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992: 43; Diamond and Plattner 2001: xi; and Makinda 1996: 557). Political participation refers to 'the entire set of behaviours, be they conventional or unconventional, legal or borderline vis-à-vis legality, that allows . . . individuals or groups to . . . strengthen group identification or try to influence the recruitment of, and decisions by, political authorities . . . in order to maintain or change the allocation of existing values' (Morlino 2011: 202). Whether conventional (formal) or non-conventional (informal), public participation is seen as, inter alia, a means to enhance development and service delivery, improve governance and deepen democracy (Buccus, Hemson, Hicks and Piper 2007: 6). Conventional opportunities for participation include electoral participation, contacting a local official, membership inside political parties and interest associations, and attendance of public forums. Examples of non-conventional forms include legal and illegal protests, striking, demonstrations, riots and boycotts (Ekman and Amnå 2012; Weitz-shapiro and Winters 2008). Youth participation, specifically, refers to the process of involving young people in the decisions and institutions that affect their environment and their lives within it (Checkoway 2011).

It is generally agreed that opportunities to participate in the political process are essential for the health of a democracy and that democracies flourish when citizens are willing to vote, take part in public debate, elect representatives, join political parties and attempt to influence political leaders (Adetula 2011; Schmitter 2004). The more citizens participate actively in the political process – that is attend public hearings, participate in demonstrations, and offer input in the policymaking process – the more attention they will pay to the outputs of these political activities and the more they will feel obligated to abide by whatever decision is made (Schmitter 2004).

Citizen participation is highly valued in Africa, borne out by the many declarations and charters signed. Article 13 of the 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights mandates that 'Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law.' In 1990, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development adopted in Addis Ababa emphasized the need to 'involve the people of Africa in the spheres of economic and political governance'. Article 3(g) of the Constitutive Act of the AU states that, among its many objectives, the AU shall 'promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance'. The 2006

African Youth Charter (discussed further below) is of supreme importance in promoting the rights of youth to participate in all spheres of life (with additional goals and aims later provided through the African Youth Decade 2009-2018 Plan of Action framework (African Union 2011)).

Another charter of significance to youth participation is the 2005 Commonwealth Youth Charter, of which all of the Anglophone states are a part, except Zimbabwe. The Charter highlights the importance of full participation of young women and men at every level of decision-making and development. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance adopted on 30 January 2007 in Addis Ababa, also acknowledges the importance of popular participation in African society. Article 31 of the Charter specifically provides for the promotion of 'participation of social groups with special needs, including the Youth (*sic*) and people with disabilities, in the governance process'. Various consecutive AU Strategic Plans have consistently emphasised youth development and empowerment over the years. The AU's Agenda 2063 framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development for Africa also recognises the essential role of the youth as drivers of change on the continent.

At the regional level, the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections encourage the participation of women, disabled and youth in all aspects of the electoral process in accordance with the national laws. The Anglophone countries that would need to abide by the above are: Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In West Africa, the Anglophone states of Ghana and Nigeria are bound by Article 1(a) of the ECOWAS 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which declares 'popular participation in decision-making' as a constitutional principle of all member states. Although there is no explicit mention of the political empowerment of young people, Article 42 does refer, albeit vaguely, to 'rules to be adopted on the training and development of the youth'. The East African community, of which Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania are member states, adopted the EAC Principles for Election Observation and Evaluation in 2012 that governs rules and responsibilities pertaining to electoral participation. Although these Principles make no specific mention of youth, they are guided by several regional and international instruments such as the aforementioned African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

The African Youth Charter: policy versus practice

The African Youth Charter (AYC) is arguably *the* most important political and legal document for youth rights on the continent. Adopted by the African Union (AU) in Banjul, Gambia, in July 2006 and entering into force in August 2009, the AYC is essentially a legal framework to guide and support policies, programmes and actions for meaningful youth participation, youth development and empowerment across Africa at continental, regional and national levels. The Charter addresses the rights and freedoms, as well as the welfare, development and responsibilities of the youth (defined by the Charter as 15-35 years). Article 11(1) speaks specifically to youth participation, providing that, 'every young person shall have the right to participate in all spheres of society'. Moreover, Article 11(2) specifically mandates all state parties to take measures to promote active youth participation in society, by undertaking to, inter alia, guarantee the equal access of young women and men to participate in parliament and other decision-making bodies.

Further to the above, Article 12 requires all African members states to generate a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy, the development of which must be 'informed by extensive consultation with young people and (must) cater for their active participation in decision-making at all levels of governance in issues concerning youth and society as a whole'. As of mid-2017, nine of the ten Anglophone states have ratified the Charter; Botswana being the sole Anglophone not to sign or ratify (AU 2017). In line with Article 12, all of the Anglophone countries have adopted National Youth Policies (NYP), with many revising those policies over time (see Table 3).

Table 3 Anglophone signatories to the AYC, National Youth Policies in place

	Signed AYC	**Ratified/Accessed AYC**	**National Youth Policy in place**
Botswana	------	------	YES (2010)
Ghana	15/01/2008	28/10/2013	YES (2010)
Kenya	28/06/2008	23/01/2014	YES (2006; 2018)
Malawi	------	13/08/2010	YES (2013)
Nigeria	02/07/2007	21/04/2009	YES (2009)
South Africa	07/05/2009	28/05/2009	YES (2009-2014; 2015-2020)

	Signed AYC	Ratified/Accessed AYC	National Youth Policy in place
Tanzania	13/11/2008	20/12/2012	YES (2007)
Uganda	------	06/08/2008	YES (2001-suspended 2017)
Zambia	10/04/2008	16/09/2009	YES (2006; 2015)
Zimbabwe	------	16/03/2009	YES (2000; 2013)

All of the Anglophone NYPs are based on or take guidance from significant legislation that promotes youth participation. The South African National Youth Policy (SANYP), which is underpinned by the principles of participation and inclusion, is informed and influenced by, inter alia, the Constitution and the National Development Plan (NDP).[3] Malawi too has enacted a number of laws on youth. Malawi's NYP identifies seven policy priority areas for action of which youth participation is first. There are a few challenges to implementing these Youth Policy strategies, not the least of which include poor monitoring and evaluation measures, inefficient management of funds and significant capacity gaps (OECD Development Centre 2018: 77). Ghana's NYP (2010: 6) has also identified inadequate opportunities for youth to participate in decision making. In Section 5.1.2 of the policy, Ghana recognises the need to 'institutionalize youth participation at all levels of the decision-making process to ensure the nurturing of democratic culture'. Kenya's Youth Development Policy (2018: 2) is informed by its Constitution which makes various provisions for the youth in Article 55, including requirements for the state to 'take measures . . . to ensure that the youth . . . be represented and participate in political, social, economic and other spheres of life'. Zambia's National Youth Policy (2015: 11) promotes public and private sector participation in youth development programmes; and also advocates for mainstreaming of youth issues in all government and private sector programmes. While Tanzania's 2007 NYP recognises that there is inadequate involvement of youth in various decision-making structures at national and international levels, and is therefore motivated to correct this, it is also criticised for being gender insensitive and lacking in innovation (AfriNYPE 2018).

All of the Anglophone states have established National Youth Councils (NYCs). In Ghana, a National Youth Council (now referred to as the National Youth Authority) was established

3 The NDP recognises the government's responsibility to strengthen youth service programmes and introduce new, community-based programmes to offer young people life skills training, entrepreneurship training and opportunities to participate in community development programmes (National Development Plan - 2030 2012: 30).

through the NYP. Its core functions include providing a platform for youth development activities and mobilising and organising the youth for participation in governance, economic, social and cultural activities. The South African Youth Council and National Youth Development Agency were established to mobilise youth organisations to ensure their participation in the country's broader societal affairs (SANYP 2015:9). Malawi's National Youth Council Act of 1996 provides for the 'promotion, coordination and implementation of youth development programmes in Malawi' as well as the establishment of the National Youth Council of Malawi (OECD Development Centre 2018:68). Kenya's National Youth Council Act, No. 10 of 2009 established the National Youth Council to facilitate, coordinate, promote, monitor and advocate for youth issues and youth-led initiatives.

However, these NYCs are confronted by serious problems that have negative implications for their effective functioning. In South Africa, for example, there is a general perception that the youth development institutions in place have failed young people, mainly as a result of a lack of clear mandates and fragmentation, resulting in duplicated responsibilities, a lack of coherent coordination of existing programmes, and a general lack of capacity (SANYP 2015:9). In Kenya's NYC, challenges lie in the weak coordination of youth initiatives, the lack of a youth mainstreaming strategy and an inadequate communication strategy on youth matters. In 2015, the Zambian National Youth Development Council (ZNYDC) board was dissolved following allegations of misappropriation of public funds (*Zambia Daily Mail Limited* 2015).

Clearly, there is an overwhelming abundance of procedural elements in place across the Anglophone states to empower youth participation. However, these do not appear to be translating into practice in a meaningful way. The AU's African Governance Architecture's 2016-2020 Youth Engagement Strategy document reports that despite the existence of the above-mentioned frameworks and policies, the meaningful engagement of youth in the processes of sustainable democratic governance and development in Africa 'has remained insufficient with limited concrete reforms or sustained practices' (African Governance Architecture 2018: 2). The AGA cites 'institutional capacity gaps, entrenched inhibitive socio-cultural attitudes, and inadequate budgetary allocations to support and scale up effective and evidence-based youth programmes' as key problems (AGA 2018: 2). One of the consequences resulting from these gaps between policy and practice is the possibility that youth will become increasingly disillusioned and disengaged from politics. Findings from a 2016 Afrobarometer survey indicate that youth engagement levels have declined over time (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016: 2). The next section will examine actual youth participation in formal processes in Anglophone Africa.

Conventional avenues of participation: Youth voters and political life

One of the primary expressions of political participation in democracies is through electoral participation (Booysen 2009: 10), and as noted above, the youth make up the majority of the voting population across Anglophone Africa. For example, in South Africa, people under the age of 29 years make up 21.4 per cent of the electorate or around nine million people. In Kenya, 78.3 per cent of the population is aged 35 and below, and about half of the 19-million registered voters (51 per cent) are in the same age bracket (Jideonwo 2017).[4] The youth make up 60 per cent of the voting public in Uganda (Mugisha et al. 2016: 55), over 65 per cent of the 2016 voting population in Ghana and accounted for 57 per cent in Tanzania's 2015 elections (Tracey 2015). In the May 2019 elections in Malawi, the Electoral Commission registered 3.7 million youth voters out of 6 826 295 million (54 per cent) (Faiti 2018). Similarly, young people between the ages of 18 and 35 comprised 54 per cent of registered voters in Zambia's 2016 elections (Commonwealth Observer Group 2016: 16). In Nigeria too, the youth made up 51 per cent of the 84 million registered voters in the 2019 elections (Akwagyiram 2019). In Zimbabwe's 2018 national elections, youths between the ages of 18 to 34 constituted 43.5 per cent of registered voters (Tshili 2018) and in Tanzania's 2015 elections, 57 per cent of registered voters were aged 18-35 (*The Citizen* Tanzania 2015).

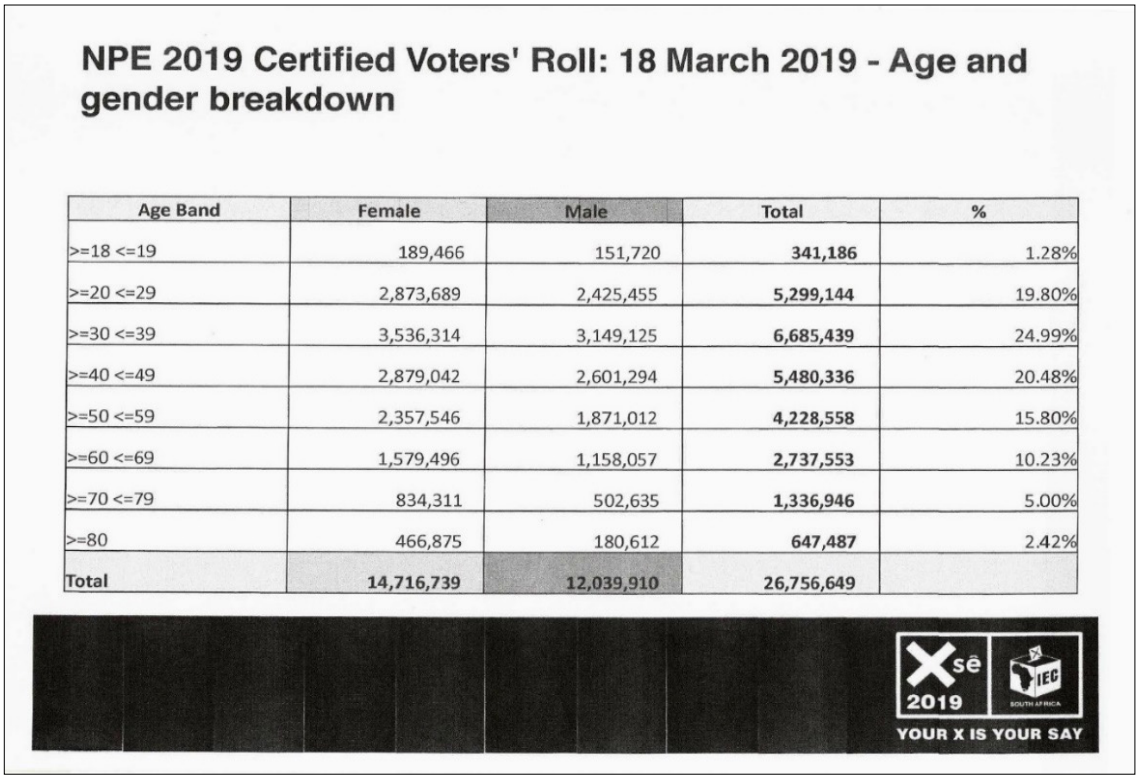
Given these numbers, it is reasonable to argue that the collective 'youth vote' in each of these countries could sway elections results should they have a mind to turn out and vote. However, Norris (2002) argues that the youngest eligible voters usually demonstrate the lowest inclination to vote. In Botswana, for example, youth are known historically to be 'less likely to be involved in decision-making activities than adults and are less likely than adults to register and vote in elections' (Ntsabane and Tau 2016: 60). Africa is not unique in this regard; globally, there have been declining proportions of young people partaking in democratic elections, and this has often been tied to a supposition of youth apathy (see, for example, Mac-Ikemenjima 2017: 215; McCormack and Doran 2014; Wattenberg 2002). A 2014/2015 Afrobarometer survey found that African youth are less likely to engage in formal political structures than their elders, particularly in terms of voting. Two-thirds (65 per cent) of 18-to-35-year-old respondents who were old enough to vote in the last national

4 This is a positive, albeit minor, increase from the 46 per cent registered for the 2013 election. Registered 26-35-year olds increased from 15 per cent in 2013 to 33.41 per cent in 2017. Registered 18-25 years olds increased very marginally from 17 per cent to 17.14 per cent in 2017 (DataScience LTD 2017).

election say they did so, compared to 79 per cent of citizens above age 35 (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016:3).

As shown in Figure 1 below, in the 2019 South African national elections, only 341 186 of the 1.8 million young people between the ages of 18 and 19 who were eligible to vote registered (18.5 per cent of eligible first-time voters). Moreover, just over one in two of those aged 20 to 29 years old registered. This is in stark contrast to those 30 years and older whose registrations shot up to over 70 percent (Haffajee 2019).

Figure 1 South African voter registration by age group 2019 national elections



NPE 2019 Certified Voters' Roll: 18 March 2019 - Age and gender breakdown

Age Band	Female	Male	Total	%
>=18 <=19	189,466	151,720	**341,186**	1.28%
>=20 <=29	2,873,689	2,425,455	**5,299,144**	19.80%
>=30 <=39	3,536,314	3,149,125	**6,685,439**	24.99%
>=40 <=49	2,879,042	2,601,294	**5,480,336**	20.48%
>=50 <=59	2,357,546	1,871,012	**4,228,558**	15.80%
>=60 <=69	1,579,496	1,158,057	**2,737,553**	10.23%
>=70 <=79	834,311	502,635	**1,336,946**	5.00%
>=80	466,875	180,612	**647,487**	2.42%
Total	**14,716,739**	**12,039,910**	**26,756,649**	

Source: Haffajee 2019

Since ballots are anonymous, disaggregated data for youth voter turnout across the Anglophone countries is not readily available. Reports of youth voter turnout therefore tend to be either generally anecdotal and based on the observations of election and polling station monitors (Moyo 2016: 11) or self-reported (See Seabo and Isbell 2018: 3). For example, according to an Afrobarometer survey, a relatively low 51 per cent of 18-35-year-olds reported turning out to vote in Botswana's most recent election, in 2017, compared to the 79 per cent of 36 to 55-year-olds, and 94 per cent over 55 years of age (Seabo and Isbell 2018).

Importantly, poor voter turnout is not necessarily an indication of a disinterested youth. A 2014/2015 Afrobarometer survey found that the majority of Anglophone youth say they are 'very' or 'somewhat' interested in public affairs. Malawian youth appear to be the most interested (71 per cent) followed by Uganda (68 per cent) and Botswana (65 per cent) while Tanzanian youth are the least interested (46 per cent). In response to the question: 'When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?', two-thirds of young Anglophone Africans say they discuss political matters 'occasionally' (48 per cent) or 'frequently' (22 per cent) with friends and family, while 30 percent say they 'never' do so. Frequent discussions of political matters are highest again among Malawian youth (38 per cent), followed by Ghana (26 per cent) and Botswana (23 per cent) and lowest in Tanzania (10 per cent). However, Kenya and Zambia share the highest proportion of youth who 'never' discuss politics in their intimate circles (35 per cent) followed closely by Ghana and Uganda (both with 34 per cent) (See Table 4).

Table 4 Youth participation in political life (18-35-year-olds)

	Interest in public affairs %	Discussion of politics %		
		Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Botswana	65	23	47	29
Ghana	55	26	40	34
Kenya	48	17	48	35
Malawi	71	38	38	24
Nigeria	58	21	62	16
South Africa	55	18	54	27
Tanzania	46	10	48	42
Uganda	68	16	49	34
Zambia	57	16	48	35
Zimbabwe	49	15	54	30

Source: Afrobarometer survey results 2014/2015

Despite apparent cognitive engagement in political affairs, the survey found that levels of de facto political engagement by youth, such as turning out at the polls; attending a campaign rally or community meeting; or contacting a community leader, is generally lower among African youth than among their elders (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016: 2). This would seem to suggest that the introduction of regional and national youth empowerment policies to engage the youth has not been sufficient.

Moreover, young women's political engagement also tends to lag behind that of young men. Article 23 (a)(b)(c) of the AYC, which focuses exclusively on girls and young women, requires signatory states not only to eliminate discriminatory legislation but also to institute programmes to make girls and young women aware of their rights and of opportunities to participate as equal members of society, including in the political sphere (African Union 2006). Although widespread

support for gender equality across Africa is increasing (see, for example, Chingwete, Richmond, Alpin 2014), 2014/2015 Afrobarometer results reveal that African women are still generally less likely than men to participate in political processes (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016: 2). Table 5 reveals the gender gap that persists between young women and men across Anglophone Africa.

Table 5 Gender gap in political life (18-35-year-olds)

	Attendance at a campaign rally	**Civic participation (community meetings/joined others to raise an issue)**	**Contact with leaders**	**Participation in a demonstration or protest march**
Botswana	10% gap	2% gap	1% gap	-3% gap
Ghana	12% gap	12% gap	14% gap	5% gap
Kenya	23% gap	12% gap	9% gap	6% gap
Malawi	12% gap	2% gap	12% gap	5% gap
Nigeria	15% gap	17% gap	14% gap	6% gap
South Africa	4% gap	7% gap	2% gap	6% gap
Tanzania	14% gap	9% gap	7% gap	1% gap
Uganda	8% gap	5% gap	7% gap	0% gap
Zambia	11% gap	7% gap	8% gap	1% gap
Zimbabwe	11% gap	5% gap	1% gap	1% gap

Source: Afrobarometer survey results 2014/2015

Table 5 denotes the gender gap (expressed in percentage point difference) that exists in actual political participation in Anglophone Africa. Evidently, young women are not engaging in political activities as much as their male peers, although Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi (2016: 19) acknowledge

that it is 'not immediately clear whether young women are choosing not to engage or are being actively prevented from doing so due to social or political pressures'. The biggest gender gap exists in Kenya where 23 per cent more young men attend campaign rallies than women. In Nigeria, 17 per cent more men than women reported attending community meetings or joining with others to raise an issue. Gender parity between Anglophone men and women is the closest to being achieved in terms of participating in a demonstration or protest march where there is a less than seven per cent gap across nine of the countries; in Uganda the same percentage of men and women reported turning out to protest (0 per cent gap).

If, as noted above, the youth make up a large population of Anglophone Africa and therefore have enormous potential to use their voting power to shift the electoral balance and political agendas towards their own issues, then why do they not turn out in greater numbers at the polls? Is 'youth apathy' really the reason behind youth disengagement from conventional avenues of participation? The next section examines possible reasons why.

Reasons for decline in formal youth participation

There are several potential explanations as to why the youth are participating less through the formal channels. As already mentioned, 'youth apathy' is often identified as the chief culprit. The suggestion is that young people, by virtue of their age, are naturally uninterested in politics, finding it boring and irrelevant to their lives (March et al. 2007). It is argued that through maturation, young people will naturally show more willingness to become involved (Cammaerts et al. 2016). While this may be true in some instances, it is unfair to paint all youth with the same brush. In South Africa, for example, research conducted in 2016 by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), found that university students, in particular, are fully cognisant of the plethora of socioeconomic and political challenges plaguing society and believe strongly in their ability to bring about 'positive change' and 'improvement' in areas such as 'education', 'bad leadership' and the current 'political landscape'. They see politics as a way of being 'heard' and a means by which the youth can make South Africa better because it 'depends on them' (Tracey 2016: 20) – a belief that was reinforced given the political response to the 2016 so-called #FeesmustFall rally. Moreover, given the vast evidence of youth activism in numerous examples across Africa, this claim seems, at best, unsupported and, at worst, erroneous.

A more compelling reason for low voter turnouts may well be that it is an indicator of declining levels of trust in political leaders who are seen to be out of touch with the concerns of the youth

(Newham and Roberts 2019). Evidence would seem to suggest that young people do want to participate in politics, but that they find the existing political culture, institutions and mechanisms of their immediate environments ineffective or unwelcoming (Commonwealth 2016 Global Youth Index and Report 2016: 30). Research conducted in 2019 in South Africa by the ISS supports this view, finding that young South Africans remain at the margins of politics and, despite rhetoric to the contrary, are largely ignored by most political parties. The result is that youth feel alienated from formal politics, have little trust in politicians, are increasingly frustrated that their grievances go unheard, and are highly critical of political leaders and parties who fail to engage with them in a meaningful manner (Newham and Roberts 2019).

Therefore, young people are increasingly disillusioned with formal politics because they perceived to be unresponsive to their needs and interests, and so refrain from participating (See Resnick and Casale 2011; Resnick and Casale 2014; and Scott, Vawda, Swartz, and Bhana 2012). In Zimbabwe, for example, youth equate African politicians with corruption, dishonesty and false promises. As such, they avoid formal politics and turn to civil society instead. In Ghana, Hounkpe and Bucyana (2019) argue that a large proportion of young people are unaware of their rights and of the electoral process, which helps politicians manipulate them, resulting, inevitably, in their deep distrust of the political process. This is confirmed by the 2016 ISS study that found South African young people generally (not at tertiary level) feel that they 'gain nothing from politics', that politics is 'full of corruption', a 'dirty game', 'a waste of time', 'a joke', 'disappointing', and generally something they do not want to get involved in. They argue that politics is all about 'self-enrichment', a quick way 'to get rich' and see no reason why they should be interested in it. Politicians lack respect and are commonly referred to as 'corrupt' people who are 'chasing after the money'; 'liars' who are 'abusing the power' they have; and as 'people who make empty promises' (Tracey 2016: 19). Youth distrust of electoral processes and institutions is a common theme across Anglophone Africa. Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, amongst others, have all experienced disputed elections results and/or discrepancies in vote-tallying systems and this has led to youth scepticism about electoral processes, and raised questions of transparency and the independence of institutions, and subsequent disengagement (Anti-Corruption International 2019).

Youth also feel undervalued and exploited. While they are often courted openly by political parties campaigning in election periods, many young people in Uganda, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa, for example, feel that these election promises are disingenuous (See, for example: Serumaga-Musisi et al. 2019). In South Africa's 2019 elections, one disaffected student who did not register to vote, argued that parties tailor their manifestos to entice voters, but do not deliver on them

when in office. She argued, 'Politics doesn't directly affect me and I can't directly affect it because it's a game,' (quoted in BusinessTech 2019). Similar findings in other studies in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that young people perceive themselves powerless to influence the outcome of elections and this, in turn, affects their voting behaviour (Resnick and Casale 2014).

Following the elections, youth also feel that they are not adequately represented in political parties or in government and on the relatively rare occasion that they are elected, young candidates often feel that they have no political power or are excluded from the decision-making processes. Many Africans feel their peers would not be more likely to turn out at the polls if more young candidates were appointed to meaningful, influential and prominent positions (Anti-Corruption International 2019). In Tanzania, a study found that young people's willingness to participate in formal political processes was linked directly to the extent to which they believed their vote would make a difference (Alm 2015). One can appreciate that many young people looking for ways to create opportunities for political participation, only to find their ideas resisted or rejected, are more likely to seek out other avenues of expressing their frustration and a sense of belonging.

Another explanation lies in inter-generational differences. Across Africa, a tradition of gerontocracy prevails. The relative old age of African leadership has resulted in the world's largest age gap between the governors and the governed, with the average age of a president at 62, while the median age of Africa's population is 19.5. In 2019, the average age of the ten Anglophone African heads of state was 69 years. In South Africa, for example, the average age of a senior politician is upwards of 55-years old, while the president is traditionally usually somewhere between 70 and 75 years old.[5] Hastings Banda, Malawi's self-proclaimed president for life, was in his late 90s when he was removed from office in 1994. In 2017, before he too was ousted, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe was 93, making him the oldest leader in the world at that time. In 2017, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni (73 at the time) signed into law a bill that removed a presidential age limit of 75 from the country's constitution to allow him to continue serving as president. At that point, he had been in power for 31 years.

In exploring possible reasons for their prolonged leadership tenures, apart from coerced legislative changes, Kiwuwa (2015) maintains that, as fathers of the nation who led independence and liberation struggles, aging African leaders still attract reverence and loyalty from their supporters. This has inevitably made them largely irreproachable, irrespective of any shortcomings, and has resulted in the people returning them to office. In this context, young people have been

5 Democratic South Africa's sixth President, Cyril Ramaphosa, is 66 years old.

discouraged from running for elected office because of perceptions that leadership should be reserved for older people. In Ghana, for example, youth have been perceived traditionally as immature and lacking the capacity and requisite technical skills and competence to perform at the highest political level (Hounkpe and Bucyana 2019). Regional Programme Coordinator with UNDP Africa, Mohamed Yahya, laments the restrictions that African gerontocracy places on young people's political participation on what is, essentially, cultural grounds (Yahya 2017).

Electoral legislation also presents another factor hindering young candidates running for elected office in that the age limits set in law effectively curtail youth participation. Some scholars argue that 'governments should treat generational inequality with the same sense of urgency as other forms of inequality, accelerating efforts to introduce youth quotas for political parties, parliaments, and other decision-making institutions' (Yahya 2017). All of the Anglophone African states have age limits in their electoral laws that prevent candidates under a certain age from contesting national elections and/or running for the highest office. In Malawi, Uganda and Zambia, one has to be 35 years or older to run for president. In Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Ghana, the minimum age limit is 40. More opportunity for youth access is provided at parliamentary level. The minimum age to be elected to parliament in South Africa, Botswana and Kenya is 18, and in Ghana, one has to be 21 to run for senate or parliament respectively. Although open to youth participation, Ghana's electoral policy does not provide for any specific positive discrimination (for example, quota) favourable towards the youth (Hounkpe and Bucyana 2019). Following the 2012 parliamentary elections in Ghana, youth groups and civil society expressed keen optimism when 44 young people were elected, an unprecedented outcome especially given the negligible numbers of youth elected previously. However, Van Gyampo (2015: 69) cautions against this type of bean-counting, arguing that 'the number of young people in Ghana's parliament does not necessarily guarantee youth representation in national decision making; rather, it promotes tokenism, exclusivity and co-optation of the youth into decision-making structures.' Signs of progress in Nigeria occurred in May 2018 when the Nigerian parliament which has been traditionally dominated by an ageing elite, voted to reduce the age limits for political office. President Muhammadu Buhari, 75 at the time, signed the 'Not Too Young To Run' bill into law reducing the minimum age for presidential candidates from 40 to 35 and national and state assembly members to 25 years. Intended to increase the participation of young people in Nigerian politics, Buhari acknowledged of the youth: 'You are undoubtedly Nigeria's most important resource - not oil, not agriculture, not solid minerals - but you and all of us . . . Your energy, intelligence and talent are what will drive and develop Nigeria, long after we are all gone (*News24* 2018).'

Importantly, while the leadership is decidedly grey, substantial portions of the populations of all of these countries are young. Given this age gap, Yahya (2017), questions how well decision makers in Africa can understand the needs and aspirations of young people. This appears to be a growing sentiment. In 2018, former South African first lady, Graça Machel, told a group of students that 'Africa does not need leaders who are 75 or 65 years old. We need leaders who are young, vibrant, innovative and who the continent's youth can relate to (Hosken 2018)'. Kiwuwa, (2015) suggests that while it is true that older politicians can provide experience, continuity, foresight and wisdom, it also cannot be ignored that the youth are 'formally educated, increasingly politically conscious, are risk takers, abound with creative ideas and are technologically savvy and entrepreneurially-minded'.

There are increasing examples of youth in Anglophone Africa no longer willing to take a back seat to their elders, regardless of their esteemed historical records. In the run up to the 2017 elections in Kenya, for example, one young man asserted that: 'The old political leaders who have been in power . . . they have been taking the youth for granted, we have been isolated and forgotten for so many times, it's high time to show these old men that we are actually the ones who employ them (Wasike 2017)'. He adds that they (young Kenyans) will vote for more young leaders because 'we have realised we are being represented by old people who are not conversant with our problems, we need more young leaders who understand our problems and can actually fight for us'. There has been some push back in this area, however. In 2018, Kenyan MPs rejected a proposal to set the age limit for presidential candidates at 70 as discriminatory, noting 'that there was a growing trend by the country to celebrate the youth but at the same time 'belittling, disparaging and demeaning the elderly' (Nyamori 2018).

Other reasons for youth disengagement lie in lived socio-economic realities such as poverty and unemployment. A recent report by the AU Commission's African Governance Architecture (2018: 2) noted that 'socio economic inequalities continue to have a negative structural impact on the abilities of young men and women to play active roles in democratic governance processes, limiting their ability to actively engage in political space'. The 2016 African Economic Outlook Report indicates that nine out of ten *working* African youths between ages of 15 and 24, including those in urban areas, are either poor or likely to be poor. Moreover, a significant number of young people, including those who have graduated from tertiary education, are without jobs. World Bank data estimates that in Ghana, about 48 per cent of young people are unemployed and 45.6 per cent of Nigerian youth are either unemployed or underemployed (Kweitsu 2017). In South Africa, the unemployment rate for the youth aged 15-24 in early 2019 stood at 55.2 per cent (StatsSA 2019b).

Youth unemployment has implications for intrinsic support for democracy as an end in and of itself, as opposed to an instrumental interpretation that carries with it conditions and potential withdrawal of support. Haffajee (2019) suggests that the level of perceived social injustice wrought by unemployment and poverty is impacting the youth buy-in to formal democracy as expressed in support for elections. The 2019 ISS study in South Africa found that young people still believe that voting is important because they live in a democracy and it represents freedom from oppression (Tonisi 2019). This support for democracy's intrinsic value is exemplified by research conducted by Engage SA in South Africa in 2019, where one first-time voter said: 'I vote because I have a voice to express' (Engage SA 2019). In another example, in an effort to tackle voter apathy among the youth of Botswana, a non-partisan youth driven movement called 'Young Voters Rock' produced a song in the run-up to the 2014 Botswana elections to appeal to the youth about the importance of voting in general elections (Botswana Guardian 2014). However, this intrinsic belief in democracy is increasingly being threatened by the harsh socio-economic realities and lived experience of the young. In South Africa there is a growing trend for young people to opt out of voting altogether when they see it as offering no benefit to them. In this increasingly transactional and reactional nature towards voting, the youth see their votes as a transaction in exchange for services that should be delivered to them by the elected government (Tonisi 2019). The feeling is that if government does not deliver on substantive socio-economic issues such as employment, then young people will not vote.

The following section discusses why African youth are tending to swop formal for informal participation practices.

Voter apathy, not political apathy? 'Informal' youth participation and hashtag politics

As noted above, many young people have become disillusioned with formal avenues of participation. The 2016 Commonwealth Global Youth Development Index and Report (2016: 71) noted that 'consciously or not, many young people are abstaining from voting and also opting out of other formal modes of political participation such as joining political parties or standing for public office'. However, this decline in formal, traditional participation does not mean that young people are disengaged from civic and political affairs. Rather, the reverse is true as evidenced by a rising tide of grassroots, youth-led protest movements and issue-based campaigns that are indicative of a youth becoming more, not less, politically conscious.

In recent years, waves of heightened political awareness have seen increasing numbers of youth engaging in protests to demand good governance and accountability from their leaders and some actively mobilising their peers to vote and contest elections (Chaturvedi 2016; Oyedemi and Mahlatji 2016). In Ghana's 2016 general elections, for example, growing youth unemployment and general resentment played a key role in the defeat of John Mahama, the first time a sitting president has lost an election in Ghana (Kweitsu 2017). In Zimbabwe in 2014-2016, the youth led 'Occupy Africa Unity Square' movement attracted international attention as disaffected youth protested against Mugabe's repressive regime (Chipato 2019). In another example, in South Africa in 2015/2016, youth demonstrations against an increase in university tuition fees in the #FeesMustFall campaign forced the government to promise free tertiary education for young people from poor families.

Evidently, young people increasingly prefer to use alternative, often creative methods to rally their peers and to share information. Some are doing it through art and music (as with the Botswana Young Voters Rock movement), and many are engaging in growing internet-based communication platforms, particularly social network sites such as Twitter and Facebook (for example, Zimbabwe's 2016/2017 #ThisFlag movement which had a huge social media reach). In the run-up to the 2015 elections in Tanzania, youth group Tanzania Bora Initiative launched a multimedia campaign called 'Uchaguzi2015TZ' to educate youth on the importance of their vote through television shows, videos on YouTube and integrated social media accounts on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (Govern 2015).

Twitter, especially, offers an attractive alternative to formal participation in several ways, not least of which is its ease of usage and ability to reach many people instantly. Twitter also supports multiple opportunities for a digitally savvy youth keen on participating on their own terms, including creating, tagging and sharing content, as well as reading, watching and following hashtags (Gleason 2013). Through Twitter, youth have an opportunity to participate online in political discussions, which they might otherwise not have chosen to engage with offline. Bosch (2017) refers to this engagement as a 'new biography of citizenship characterised by more individualised forms of sub activism' wherein young people act not towards the state but towards specific issues or causes that might be seen to be more personal but no less political (Farthing 2010: 188).

Research conducted by the Centre for Social Development in Africa in 2017, confirms that South African youth use social media widely both to voice protest as well as to share issue-based views. These range from issues affecting their own communities such as crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy to wider social concerns about xenophobia. Youth responses affirmed

that 'all these approaches were more appealing, meaningful and accessible than political party membership and voting' (Graham 2017). In Nigeria too, where many young people are active users of social media, hashtag campaigns and online engagement, social media is considered to be particularly powerful because it allows individual users to broadcast their personal experiences and link them with a wider effort and broader community, as was the case in 2017 when the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement launched the #BounceCorruption initiative (Itodo and O'Regan 2018: 6).

It is a truism that social media sites and other online communication platforms are making it easier to access information and ideas, and therefore to mobilise and empower young people. However, critics warn that 'clicktivism', a term used to describe low-level, online engagement such as signing e-petitions, sharing posts or using hashtags may in fact stand in the way of committed participation. That is, while technology has made it fairly easy to support a cause, the engagement is often superficial and short-lived, with questionable tangible consequences for positive change (Shearlaw 2015). South African students in the 2015 #RhodesMustFall campaign might argue with this notion, however. The student-led protest which campaigned to remove the statue of British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town on the grounds that it promoted institutionalised racism and a culture of exclusion particularly for black students, was successful. The statue was removed a month later. In this campaign, social media communication was used for self-representation, self-organisation and interaction with the media, university administration and opponents to the campaign (Bosch 2016: 22). This example, among others, represents the potential power of student activism among the African youth. It demonstrates a sense of student protestors' increasing belief in their own political agency, and also reveals the increasing power of youth groups to act as a catalyst for change (Hodgkinson and Melchiorre, 2019).

Of course, if the internet is going to continue to be the platform most utilised by the youth as an enabler for participation, then it follows that improved mobile internet connectivity is an imperative. Even though Africa lags behind the rest of the world in terms of mobile connectivity, mobile internet penetration is growing. The 2019 State of Mobile Internet Connectivity Report, which measures the performance of 163 countries in terms of mobile internet penetration, reveals an improvement across Sub-Saharan Africa from 13 per cent in 2014 to 24 per cent in 2018 (Bahia and Suardi 2019: 50). The higher the percentage, the better the mobile internet penetration. South Africa, Ghana and Kenya have improved in the last year improving their scores with 59 per cent, 51 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. Botswana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe are considered 'emerging' with scores in the high 30 and 40 per cents, while Zambia and Malawi bring

up the rear with 33 per cent and 24 percent respectively.

Conclusion

Across the Anglophone states there are many policy frameworks in place to empower youth participation and it is apparent, on paper at least, that all states are aware of the importance and value of youth participation across all spheres in their societies. While these policies are bearing fruit in some instances, through the establishment of Youth Councils, for example, there are still many gaps in the facilitation of meaningful participation by the youth. A lack of capacity, ineffective communication and poor monitoring and evaluation practices are among many issues that are impeding youth engagement. Across the board there also seems to be a definite sense of generational difference that persists, where youth often do not feel understood or appreciated for their views and suggestions by the predominantly older political leadership. These bureaucratic, political, economic and socio-cultural problems must be overcome if youth are to feel that their involvement is bringing about significant social change. There is also a gender gap between participation by young men and young women, where young women do not always participate as much. The reasons for this need to be interrogated and resolved.

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