

Africa: The next generation, hope and the nation

By Jean Devlin
Compiled with data from CORE

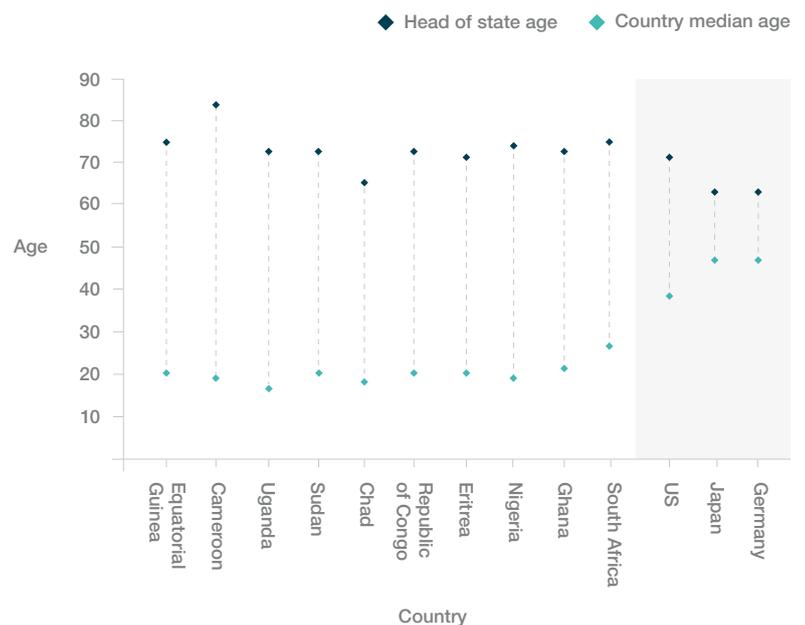


The disparity between the advanced ages of many African leaders and the youthful populations over which they preside is remarkable: the average age of African heads of state is currently 65, about ten years older than the average age of current EU heads of state or US presidents on election. The demographic pressures that come from below have undoubtedly been influencing how political leaders respond to the demands of their citizens, a trend long highlighted in our RiskMap analysis.

With one of Africa's longest-standing and oldest leaders, Robert Mugabe, now swept from power in Zimbabwe (as we anticipated in RiskMap 2017), it is a timely moment to ask how political leadership is changing in response to these pressures and who will emerge in the next generation. Political transitions can be unsettling, but are likely to become more common. Anticipating and preparing for how they will affect business is essential for success in 2018 and beyond. We have identified five key power dynamics to watch in the coming year.

Source: Control Risks CORE © Control Risks 2017

Country	Head of state age	Country median age
Equatorial Guinea*	75	19.6
Cameroon*	84	18.5
Uganda*	73	15.7
Sudan*	73	19.6
Chad*	65	17.6
Congo (Brazzaville)*	73	19.7
Eritrea*	71	19.4
Nigeria	74	18.3
Ghana	73	21
South Africa	75	26.8
US	71	37.9
Japan	63	46.9
Germany	63	46.8



*Have been in power for more than two decades



The reformer-turned-autocrat

“The problems of Africa, and Uganda in particular, are caused by leaders who overstay in power, which breeds impunity, corruption and promotes patronage,” declared Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in his inaugural speech in 1986. Thirty-one years later and the septuagenarian has become the poster child for third-termist presidents on the continent. Since 2000, 15 African leaders have tried to remain in power by changing their countries’ constitutions to do away with presidential term or age limits. Considering how term limits and other principles of political competition apply in practice reveals the extent to which nominally democratic systems are open to manipulation. Leaders intent on furthering their rule almost inevitably strike unwritten bargains to advance the interests of a narrow political, business, military or ethnic elite as a means of staying in power.

Like Museveni, Mugabe possessed a political tenacity that allowed him to rule for 37 years. The somewhat chaotic eventual transition of power in Zimbabwe heralds a more hopeful future for many. But the hard tasks of digging the country out of its hole of debt arrears and addressing much-needed public sector reform will only begin in earnest in 2018. Having served in senior government posts since independence, 75-year-old President Emmerson Mnangagwa hardly represents a major generational shift in leadership. It remains to be seen how much popular support for Mugabe’s removal will weigh on Mnangagwa’s style of leadership, and voters will soon have a chance to pronounce on their second president, with elections due in 2018.

Family dynasties and playboy presidents

Perceptions that family members have been lined up as successors have been key to some recent power transitions in the region. And in many places, if you want to be president, the main qualification required is having the correct surname. Dynastic successions are attractive to long-serving leaders as the most effective means of safeguarding family wealth and influence. But they are coming under greater scrutiny, and resentment of countries being run for personal gain is gaining momentum. In West Africa, members of the Gnassingbé family have run Togo for 50 of the 57 years since independence, and anti-government protests rocked the country in late 2017. Elsewhere the persistence of nepotism casts a shadow over good governance: Equatorial Guinea’s playboy Vice-President Teodoro Obiang has been earmarked to succeed his father in a country wracked by corruption.

The consensus candidate

Transitions don’t have to be quite so messy. One preferred option among ruling parties in dominant-party systems has been to select a non-threatening consensus candidate to balance different factional interests within a broad tent. The logic goes that a consensus candidate will help the party to heal divisions that have emerged during succession tussles, and preserve its dominance of the political space. While such candidates – Hailemariam Desalegn in Ethiopia, Filipe Nyusi in Mozambique, João Lourenço in Angola – owe their selection to the party apparatus, they have often proved bolder than expected. Hailemariam has mustered his own political clout, significantly reshuffling his cabinet in November 2016 to increase ethnic diversity and add technocrats, following months of often violent protests. As he attempts to widen his support base, power is shifting within the ruling alliance, a development fraught with stability risks.

The headline change in Angola in 2017 was seismic, given that former president José Eduardo dos Santos spent 38 years in power, but change within the country's colossal power structures was expected to be slower. However, Lourenço has proven willing to challenge the dos Santos dynasty, removing the former president's daughter as head of the national oil company. He has also pledged to tackle the monopolies that dominate sub-Saharan Africa's third-largest economy, paving the way for more significant changes and reforms to the policy environment in 2018.

Recycled leaders

When campaigning for the Nigerian presidency in 2015, Muhammadu Buhari described himself as a "born-again democrat". Buhari had briefly served as military head of state in 1983-85, during which time he earned a poor record for human rights by detaining opponents, gagging the press and expelling 700,000 immigrants. Thirty years on, Buhari's centralised style of leadership and vision have not had the impact that many of his supporters had expected. Businesses remain exposed to risks of corruption, dated economic policies have brought about capital controls and import bans that have deterred investment, and often violent confrontations between political and religious groups are cause for concern.

Given his medical absences during 2017, Buhari's health is a key factor in shaping succession dynamics. Provided he is healthy enough to run a credible campaign, he will be likely to win again in 2019 with the help of his north-western base, even if support is waning elsewhere. If not, the race will appear to be wide open. In reality, political contenders are carefully choreographed by the country's kingmakers – veteran politicians with deep pockets and influence. Even in Africa's most populous country, where the average age is well below 20, it remains an uphill struggle to earn the political chops needed to gain the confidence of these key powerbrokers. Moreover, policy and reform credentials alone are insufficient. Religious and ethnic politics will play a visible role in the selection – and election – of candidates.

Cyril Ramaphosa, Deputy President of South Africa, President of the ANC and Tanzanian President, John Magufuli (Mujahid Safodien/AFP/Getty Images, Daniel Hayduk/AFP/Getty Images)



The man – or woman – of the people

Amid socioeconomic grievances, usually business-friendly governments are steering towards nationalistic, populist policies with promises of wealth redistribution. Restrictions on trade and imported goods, and limited labour mobility are becoming problematic for corporates. In Tanzania, President John Magufuli has deployed interventionist policies in the extractives sector, fast-tracking three new controversial mining laws that allow Tanzania to cancel and renegotiate contracts and force operations to submit to a new regulatory regime. In attempting to ensure that Tanzania gets what he considers the best deal from its natural resources, Magufuli is undertaking a high-stakes gamble that risks scaring off foreign investors.

Meanwhile, South Africa's "radical economic transformation" agenda has fuelled antagonistic rhetoric towards foreign commercial interests, adding to uncertainty and dislodging more substantive policy reform. While the more market-friendly Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa emerged triumphant over former African Union Commission chair Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in the contest to succeed President Jacob Zuma as governing African National Congress (ANC) leader, the divisions laid bare during the campaign within the dominant party will not heal quickly in 2018. We expect that Ramaphosa will struggle to impose his authority on the party in early 2018. He is likely to push for internal investigations into corruption relating to party and government officials but his ability to do so will be challenged by the balance of power among the party's top 6 powerbrokers as well as the 80-member National Executive Committee – the ANC's highest decision-making body between conferences – both of which are split between Ramaphosa and Zuma supporters. As a result we see policy uncertainty and stagnation on key issues such as the Mining Charter and nuclear procurement lasting well into 2018.



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CORE provides incisive analysis and forecasting on geopolitical and security issues, comprehensive country risk ratings, an extensive database of incidents, plus visualisation and analytics tools.
