



**Legislative
Mentorship
Initiative (LMI)**



POLICY BRIEF

THE STATE OF YOUTH REPRESENTATION IN AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS



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1. Executive Summary

Africa is home to the world's youngest population, with approximately 70% of its population under the age of 30. Despite this demographic advantage, young people remain significantly underrepresented in national parliaments across the continent. This policy brief examines the state of youth representation in African parliaments through a continental and comparative analysis, drawing on selected country case studies from Cameroon, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa. It uses parliamentary age data, constitutional and legal provisions, and country-level evidence to assess the institutional, political and socio-cultural factors that shape young people's access to legislative office.

This brief highlights emerging trends, persistent challenges and effective practices in youth political representation. While many African countries have strengthened constitutional and legal commitments to youth participation, these have not translated into proportional parliamentary representation. Across the selected countries, the proportion of parliamentarians aged 30 years or below ranges from 1.1% in Cameroon to 4.6% in Morocco, reflecting significant disparities in youth representation. Restrictive political party structures, high campaign costs, limited access to political networks and socio-cultural perceptions continue to constrain young people's participation in parliament.

The analysis also highlights encouraging developments, including youth-focused legislative reforms. It further examines the contribution of the Conference of Speakers and Presidents of African Legislatures (CoSPAL), through the Legislative Mentorship Initiative (LMI), in nurturing emerging legislative leaders and advancing youth-inclusive parliamentary governance. The brief concludes by recommending practical reforms to strengthen youth representation, including greater investment in leadership development, more inclusive political party practices and improved access to political campaign financing.



2. Background

The African Youth Charter defines youth as every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. Young people remain central to Africa's social, economic and political development and represent one of the continent's greatest strategic assets. According to the World Bank, approximately 70% of Africa's population is under the age of 30, making it the world's youngest continent (World Bank 2023). Harnessing this demographic dividend will depend not only on expanding access to education, employment and entrepreneurship but also on ensuring that young people participate meaningfully in public decision-making and democratic governance.

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Democratic governance in Africa has continued to evolve through constitutional reforms, competitive elections and efforts to strengthen parliamentary institutions. As representative institutions, parliaments are expected to reflect the diversity of the societies they serve by ensuring that women, youth and other underrepresented groups participate meaningfully in legislative decision-making. Youth are not only beneficiaries of public policies; they are active stakeholders whose perspectives are essential in shaping legislation.

Against this backdrop, strengthening youth representation in African parliaments is not simply a question of demographic inclusion; it is fundamental to **building more representative, responsive and future-oriented legislatures**. Greater youth participation brings diverse perspectives to legislative decision-making, strengthens democratic legitimacy, promotes policy innovation and ensures that parliamentary institutions are better equipped to respond to the aspirations and priorities of Africa's growing youth population.



3. Current State of Youth Representation in African Parliaments

Several African countries have introduced constitutional reforms, national youth policies and legislative measures to encourage greater youth participation in governance. **Morocco's 2011 Constitution** recognises the role of young people in national development and requires public authorities to establish mechanisms that promote their participation in social, economic, cultural and political life (Constitution of Morocco, 2011, Article 33). Similarly, **Kenya's 2010 Constitution** recognises youth as a special interest group and commits the State to promoting their participation in political, social and economic life (Constitution of Kenya, 2010, Article 55). Similar constitutional and policy measures have been adopted across several African countries, reflecting a growing recognition that inclusive governance requires the active participation of younger generations.

However, constitutional recognition has not translated into proportional representation in national legislatures. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Youth Participation in National Parliaments (2025), only **“2.8% of parliamentarians globally are aged 30 years or below”** or below, highlighting the limited presence of young people in legislatures worldwide. To examine how this global trend is reflected in Africa, this brief compares youth representation across five selected case-study countries. The analysis reveals considerable variation in youth representation, with Morocco recording the highest proportion of parliamentarians aged 30 years or below (4.6%), followed by Senegal (3.8%), South Africa (2.8%), Kenya (2.0%) and Cameroon (1.1%).

Compared with the global average, only Morocco and Senegal exceed the benchmark, while South Africa aligns with it and Kenya and Cameroon fall below it. These findings suggest that constitutional reforms provide an important foundation but are insufficient on their own to ensure meaningful youth representation in legislative institutions.

One clear lesson from the selected countries is that constitutional and legal reforms create opportunities, but implementation determines outcomes.



Morocco presents one of the strongest examples of institutional support for youth political participation. Beyond constitutional recognition of the role of young people in national development and the establishment of mechanisms to promote youth participation, Morocco operates a national list system that reserves 30 of the 395 seats in the House of Representatives for candidates under the age of 40. Although this measure is not specifically targeted at candidates aged 30 years or below, Morocco records the highest proportion of parliamentarians aged 30 years or below (4.6%) among the selected countries, **suggesting that targeted institutional measures can strengthen opportunities for youth political representation.**

Kenya similarly provides a strong constitutional foundation for youth participation. The 2010 Constitution recognises youth as a special interest group and requires the State to promote their participation in political, social and economic life.

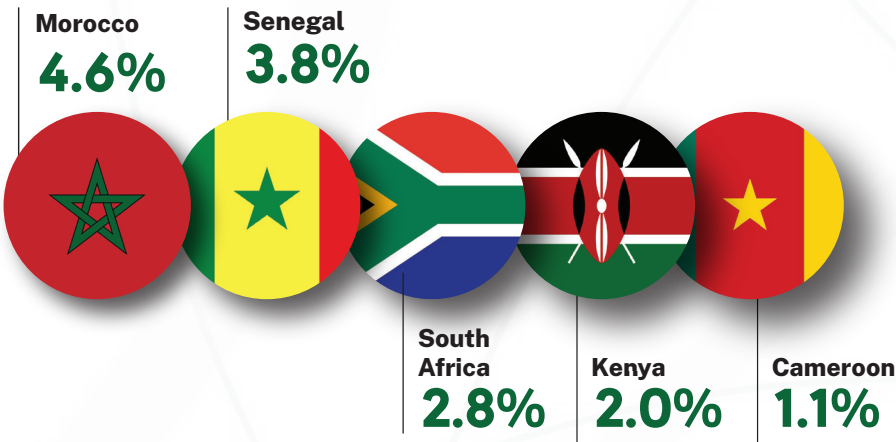


Fig. Youth representation across five selected case-study countries.
Source: IPU, 2025



The National Assembly also includes nominated members representing special interests, including youth, persons with disabilities and workers. Nevertheless, only 2.0% of Kenyan parliamentarians are aged 30 years or below, illustrating that constitutional guarantees alone do not automatically translate into greater youth representation.

The experiences of Senegal and South Africa demonstrate that active youth participation in democratic processes does not necessarily lead to proportional parliamentary representation. Senegal's recent democratic transition highlighted the growing influence of youth political mobilisation, with young people playing an important role in civic engagement and electoral participation. Yet, despite this increased political engagement, only 3.8% of members of the National Assembly are aged 30 years or below.

“3.8% of members of the National Assembly are aged 30 years or below”

Similarly, South Africa possesses one of Africa's most inclusive constitutions, supported by vibrant civil society organisations and active youth movements. However, young people account for only 2.8% of members of the National Assembly, suggesting that democratic maturity alone does not guarantee greater youth representation where political party structures and candidate selection processes continue to favour experienced political actors.

By contrast, the pace of political renewal in Cameroon is different. Although constitutional and policy measures encourage youth participation in public affairs, opportunities for younger generations to enter the National Assembly remain limited. The country records the lowest level of youth representation among the selected case studies, with only 1.1% of parliamentarians aged 30 years or below. Long-standing political leadership, entrenched party structures and limited political competition continue to constrain political renewal and restrict opportunities for emerging young leaders to access legislative office.

“Young people account for only 2.8% of members of the National Assembly”

Beyond representation, the selected countries also differ in the institutional arrangements that shape youth participation. Morocco allows candidates to contest



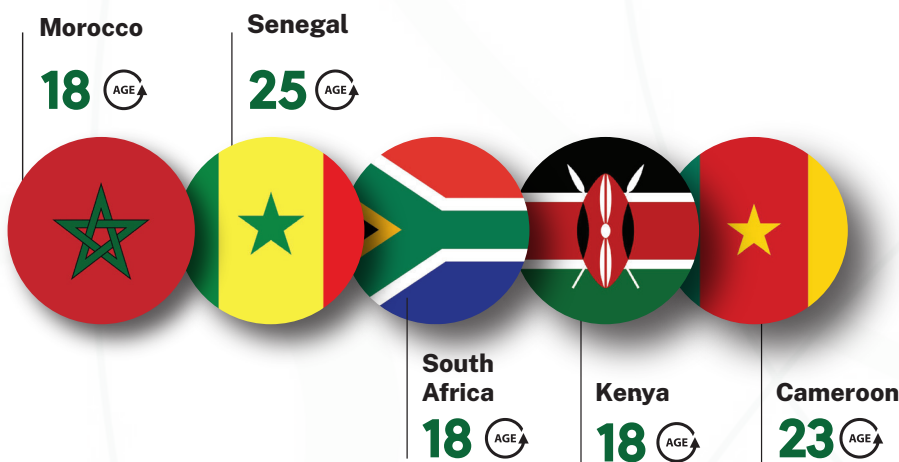


Fig. Minimum age for parliamentary representation across five selected case-study countries. (Source: IPU, 2025)

elections to the House of Representatives from the age of 18 and operates a national list arrangement that reserves 30 of its 395 seats for candidates under the age of 40. Kenya and South Africa also permit parliamentary candidature from the age of 18 but do not operate dedicated youth quotas. Cameroon requires candidates for the

“Cameroon requires candidates for the National Assembly to be at least 23 years old, while Senegal sets the minimum age for its National Assembly at 25 years.”

National Assembly to be at least 23 years old, while Senegal sets the minimum age for its National Assembly at 25 years.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that youth representation in African parliaments is influenced by a combination of constitutional provisions, political institutions and broader governance dynamics. Countries that have complemented constitutional recognition with targeted institutional measures, such as Morocco's national list arrangement for candidates under the age of 40, have recorded comparatively higher levels of youth representation.

However, the experiences of Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and Cameroon demonstrate that constitutional reforms, civic participation and democratic institutions alone are insufficient to achieve equitable youth representation without sustained political commitment, inclusive political party practices, affordable access to elections and deliberate efforts to reduce barriers to legislative office.

4. Key Barriers and Emerging Opportunities

Although many African countries have strengthened constitutional and policy commitments to youth participation, meaningful **representation in national parliaments remains limited**. Evidence from the selected case studies suggests that the challenge is no longer simply the absence of legal recognition, but the persistence of financial, political, institutional and socio-cultural barriers that continue to prevent qualified young people from accessing legislative office, as further outlines below.



Financial barriers remain one of the greatest obstacles to youth representation. Across many African countries, election campaigns require considerable financial resources, while high political party nomination fees and limited access to campaign financing discourage many young candidates from contesting parliamentary elections. The experiences of Kenya and Senegal illustrate how financial constraints continue to limit youth representation despite strong constitutional and civic participation frameworks and instruments.



Political and institutional barriers further constrain opportunities for young people to enter legislative office. Political party candidate selection processes often favour senior politicians, incumbents and individuals with established political networks, limiting opportunities for younger candidates to secure party nominations. Cameroon provides a clear example, where limited political renewal and entrenched party structures continue to restrict opportunities for emerging leaders as outlined in the African Journal for Elections.





Socio-cultural perceptions also reinforce these barriers. In many African societies, political leadership continues to be associated with age, seniority and experience, influencing both candidate selection processes and voter preferences. These perceptions often create additional obstacles for younger candidates, even where they possess the qualifications, leadership capacity and public support required to serve effectively in parliament.



Encouraging opportunities are, however, emerging across the continent. Growing youth civic engagement, digital mobilisation and increased public demand for accountable governance have expanded youth influence in democratic processes. Leadership development programmes, parliamentary mentorship initiatives (like LMI), civic education and youth policy platforms are also strengthening the capacity of young people to engage in public leadership. At the institutional level, constitutional reforms, parliamentary youth caucuses, inclusive political party practices and targeted measures, such as Morocco's youth quota, demonstrate that deliberate interventions can improve youth representation when effectively implemented.



5. Institutional Responses

Strengthening youth representation requires more than constitutional reforms and political commitment; it also depends on building strong legislative institutions and developing future parliamentary leaders. As an indigenous Pan-African inter-parliamentary organisation, the Conference of Speakers and Presidents of African Legislatures (CoSPAL) promotes legislative cooperation, peer learning and institutional development across Africa. Recognising the need to strengthen the pipeline of future legislative leaders, CoSPAL manages the Legislative Mentorship Initiative (LMI) as its flagship youth leadership programme to equip young Africans with practical knowledge of legislative governance, democratic leadership and public service. Through mentorship, practical learning and engagement with parliamentary leaders, LMI complements CoSPAL's broader efforts to strengthen parliamentary institutions by promoting intergenerational leadership, knowledge exchange and structured pathways for youth participation in legislative governance.



6. Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Youth Representation and Institutional Pathways in African Parliaments



Within the next three years, African parliaments should review legislative and institutional barriers that restrict youth representation. Where constitutionally and politically feasible, parliaments should consider introducing youth quotas, establish or strengthen youth parliamentary caucuses, and institutionalise parliamentary mentorship, internship and fellowship programmes to prepare young people for legislative office. Annual reports on youth representation should also be published to monitor progress, strengthen accountability and inform future reforms.

Embedding Youth Political Inclusion in National Development and Governance Frameworks



Within the next three to five years, governments should integrate youth political inclusion into national development plans by expanding investment in civic education, leadership development and transparent political financing mechanisms that reduce financial barriers for qualified young candidates. Governments should also strengthen collaboration with electoral management bodies, political parties and civil society organisations to promote inclusive political participation.





Reforming Political Party Structures and Candidate Selection Processes

Ahead of the next electoral cycle, political parties should adopt transparent and merit-based candidate selection processes, expand opportunities for young people to hold leadership positions within party structures, review nomination fees to reduce financial barriers for qualified young aspirants and establish structured mentorship programmes that strengthen the pipeline of future legislators.



Expanding Investment in Youth Leadership and Legislative Capacity-Building

Within the next three years, development partners should increase technical and financial support for youth leadership development, parliamentary capacity-building and research on youth political participation. Greater collaboration with African parliaments, CoSPAL, LMI and youth-led organisations can strengthen evidence-based reforms and promote more inclusive legislative governance across the continent.



Strengthening Youth-Led Civic Engagement and Legislative Participation

Over the next three years, youth organisations should strengthen civic education, policy advocacy and leadership development initiatives while building strategic partnerships with parliaments, political parties and civil society organisations. Expanding mentorship, legislative engagement and policy dialogue programmes will help equip young people with the knowledge, skills and networks required to participate effectively in parliamentary governance.

7. Conclusion

Africa's youthful population presents a unique opportunity to strengthen democratic governance and accelerate sustainable development across the continent. However, this demographic advantage can only be fully realised when young people are meaningfully represented in legislative institutions and have the opportunity to contribute to public decision-making. While many African countries have made important progress through constitutional reforms and youth participation initiatives, significant structural, financial and political barriers continue to limit youth representation in parliament. Addressing these challenges will require sustained political commitment, inclusive institutional reforms and stronger investment in youth leadership development. Investing in youth representation is a long-term investment in building more responsive, representative and resilient legislatures across Africa.



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Annex I: Methodological Note

Methodology

This policy brief adopts a comparative qualitative approach to examine youth representation in African parliaments. Five countries (Cameroon, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal and South Africa) were purposively selected to reflect diverse constitutional, political and institutional approaches to youth political participation across different regions of Africa. The selected countries also demonstrate varying levels of youth parliamentary representation, electoral systems and institutional arrangements, enabling a comparative assessment of the factors that influence young people's access to legislative office.

The analysis draws primarily on data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Youth Participation in National Parliaments Database (2025), complemented by national constitutions, electoral laws and relevant secondary literature.

For consistency and comparability, the analysis focuses on the lower or single chamber of parliament in each country. Accordingly, the parliamentary institutions examined are the House of Representatives (Morocco) and the National Assemblies of Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and Cameroon.

In this brief, youth representation is measured using the Inter-Parliamentary Union's definition of parliamentarians aged 30 years or below. While the African Youth Charter defines youth as persons aged 15–35 years, the IPU adopts the 30 years and below threshold to enable consistent international comparison of parliamentary age profiles.

The parliamentary representation data presented in this brief reflect the most recent composition of national parliaments available in the IPU database as at 2025.





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