

# Africa's Demographic Timebomb: Implications for National Security in the Twenty First Century

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## Abstract

*Africa is undergoing a notable demographic transformation, characterized by a rapidly increasing youth population that holds the capacity to either propel progress or foster instability. In West Africa, the median age is among the lowest in the world, underscoring the dual nature of opportunities and challenges that arise from this trend. Although there is significant potential for economic development and social change, ongoing issues like unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted political participation pose serious hurdles. This paper explores the central question: How can African governments implement tailored Empowerment, Education, and Employment (3E) policies to address socio-economic challenges, enhance governance, and prevent instability, transforming the continent's youth demographic into a sustainable driver of development? Drawing on the 3E Policy Framework, the study emphasizes the need for strategic interventions, including aligning education systems with labor market demands, fostering youth entrepreneurship, and enhancing political inclusion to strengthen national security. These policies are crucial for turning Africa's demographic shift into a catalyst for sustainable development and long-term stability and for ensuring national security.*

**Keywords:** Unemployment, Policy Reform, Youthquake, Violent Extremism, Socio-Economic Challenges, Youth Empowerment, Political Inclusion

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## **Introduction**

Africa's Demographic landscape has experienced a drastic change during recent years with an unprecedented rise in the youth population. At current times over 60% of Africa is under the age of 25 which makes it one of the youngest demographics around the globe. This youth-oriented populace is predicted to represent as much as 42% of the global populace by 2030. The transitioning demographic shift is offering both opportunities and challenges for the continent. In particular, western Africa stands out, with a median age of around 18 years, which makes it one of the youngest regions of the world. States including Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso feature some of the highest fertility rates, further contributing to this immense growth.<sup>1</sup> Opportunities for a “youth dividend” –the idea that a large youthful workforce could catalyze economic growth and innovation- are substantial. Yet, this bright future relies on the African governments' ability to utilize their demographic dividend while addressing socio-economic pressures, such as youth unemployment, limited educational resources, and infrastructure deficits.<sup>2</sup>

The national security of a state is not just limited to traditional security. It includes traditional and non-traditional security threats.<sup>3</sup> The lack of effective governance weakens the social contract between people and state. Extremist groups can utilize this to enhance their power and can also reduce the effectiveness of the state institutions.<sup>4</sup> This reduces the government ability to ensure security, which further deteriorates economic situation and its ability to deliver. As a result, the social contract between people and state further loses its strength.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is imperative for the state to implement 3E model to reduce the risk to national security.

Edward Paice notes in his book *Youthquake: Why African Demography Should Matter to the World* that a growing youth population alone is not enough to secure development. The continent's future hinges on our ability to invest strategically in education, skills development, and governance systems that effectively capture this demographic. Failing to address these

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group, “Fertility Rate, Total (Births Per Woman)” (n. D.), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>.

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Akwetey, “Youth and Political Development: Deploying Youth Capacities, Confronting the Challenge”, *Institute for Democratic Governance (Ideg)* (2006), <https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ADF/ADF5/issuepaper.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony J. Masys, “Non-Traditional Security: A Risk-Centric View,” in *Handbook of Security Science*, ed. Anthony J. Masys (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 459–74, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91875-4\\_54](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91875-4_54).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret White, “Violent Extremism and the Social Contract Theory,” *Police Chief Magazine* (blog), July 21, 2022, <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/violent-extremism-and-the-social-contract-theory/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

could result in mounting frustrations among youth, who feel excluded from economic possibilities and political decision-making processes.<sup>6</sup>

The Sahel, where many young people face limited economic prospects, has been targeted by extremist groups that exploit the lack of opportunities to recruit disenfranchised youth. The emergence of these factions demonstrates the potential dangers if governments and international organizations fail to respond adequately to the needs of this population. Conversely, African youth are leading voices in challenging the status quo – through social movements, asking for more space at the governance table and a larger slice of political and economic opportunity. Africa's future is in youth empowerment, investment in education, job creation, and good governance.

Moreover, African countries can turn their youth bulge into a driver of economic growth and societal development; however, without specific measures to address these, the continent risks losing a potentially powerful demographic dividend.<sup>7</sup> While scholars like Paice and organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have examined Africa's demographic potential, there remains a lack of actionable frameworks to guide governments in realizing this opportunity. This study addresses this gap by applying the World Economic Forum's 3E Policy Framework – Empower, Educate, and Employ, as a lens to evaluate how African governments can transform the challenges posed by their youth demographic into sustainable growth and stability.<sup>8</sup> This paper addresses the central research question: *How can African governments implement tailored Empowerment, Education, and Employment (3E) policies to address socio-economic challenges, enhance governance, and prevent instability, extremism, transforming the continent's youth demographic into a sustainable driver of development?*

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, relying on an in-depth analysis of secondary data from policy reports, academic literature, and statistical datasets. Sources include reports from the UNDP, World Bank, and Afrobarometer surveys, as well as peer-reviewed studies. The research focuses on three interconnected pillars: Empowerment, which examines how expanding rights and reducing marginalization can promote equity and

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Mulligan, "Youthquake: Why African Demography Should Matter to the World". *The Round Table*, (2022): 111 (5), 647–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2022.2130628>

<sup>7</sup> Leigh Mayhew et al., "The intersection between socioeconomic conditions and youth radicalization - Implications for programming in the G5 Sahel countries" (2022), Rome, FAO, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8658en>

<sup>8</sup> World Economic Forum, "A 3E Policy Framework to Reap the Demographic Dividend: Empower, Educate, Employ" (n.D.), <https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/The%203Es%20policy%20framework%20to%20reap%20the%20demographic%20dividend%20Empower%20employ%20educate.pdf>

inclusion; Education, which evaluates reforms to align curricula with labor market demands; and Employment, which investigates strategies to foster entrepreneurship and create jobs in high-growth sectors such as technology and renewable energy. While this reliance on secondary data limits insights into localized contexts, it provides a structured analysis of broader trends and actionable policy recommendations.

### **The “Youthquake”**

“Youthquake” is a demographic shift of influence – Deploying the potential in young people on African socio-political and economic structures. It underlines their growing desire for active participation in governance and decision-making processes. African youth, driven by a demand for reform and high ambitions, are becoming increasingly vocal and active in shaping their nations’ features. The Ghanaian “DumsorMustStop” campaign, initiated by actress Yvonne Nelson to protest frequent power outages and the youth-led protests in Kenya against the Finance Bill 2024, illustrates the growing impact of African youth on national dialogues. Both movements underline the role of youth in advocating for improved governance and infrastructure while exposing systematic deficiencies within state institutions and governance.<sup>9</sup>

Across the continent, leaders of tomorrow are channeling accountability towards increasing outdated political systems through youth activism. In Sudan, it was primarily young people who spearheaded the movement that eventually led to the ousting of longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir, showcasing the critical role of youth in driving political change. In Senegal, young activists are mobilizing for reforms to improve governance, pressing leaders to meet their demands for transparency and justice. Similarly, in the Gambia, young citizens took to the streets of Banjul in July 2024, protesting economic policies that disproportionately benefit the privileged, demanding the government to take action to address inequality.<sup>10</sup> These examples demonstrate how youth across the continent are emerging as powerful forces, unafraid to challenge the status quo and push for deeper reforms that could reshape their future.

This youth-driven movement represents both significant opportunities and considerable challenges. On one hand, the youthful population represents immense economic growth and innovation potential. African youth have already shown their entrepreneurial spirit and technological capabilities in multiple sectors ranging from technological startups and creative

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Ezugwu Onodi, “Youthquake and Public Accountability Of Emerging Leadership In Developing Economy”, *Department Of Accounting, College Of Management Sciences, Michael Okpara University Of Agriculture* (n. D.), <https://cnaj.anan.org.ng/downloads/15edf52e5483f22999fdbc6d1d3d11c8.pdf>

Khasai Makhulo, “Taking Charge: Gen Z Leads Historic Protests in Kenya”, *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2024), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/taking-charge-gen-z-leads-historic-protests-kenya>

<sup>10</sup> Ebrima Faal, “Youth and women are shaping Africa’s future”, *London School of Economics and Political Science*, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2024/10/03/youth-and-women-are-shaping-africas-future/>

industries to agriculture.<sup>11</sup> The swift growth in the youthful population brings to light significant challenges in governance, infrastructure, and the availability of employment. In nations like Ghana and Burkina Faso, where unemployment rates stand at about 3.08% and 5.29%, respectively,<sup>12</sup> the pressure on governments to tackle these issues is intensifying. Addressing the need for job creation, education, and public services becomes paramount in meeting the demands of this fast-growing population.<sup>13</sup>

In *Youthquake: Why African Demography Should Matter to the World*, Edward Paice delves into the complexity of Africa's demographic changes, questioning the widespread belief in "demographic determinism" — the idea that a large, young population will inevitably lead to economic prosperity. He highlights that Africa's situation is far more nuanced than this simplistic view suggests. Paice argues that the continent's varying demographic and socio-political environments make it impossible to apply one-size-fits-all explanations. The link between population growth and economic outcomes is far from uniform across Africa. Thus, recognizing the intricacy of these demographic shifts is crucial; it is not simply population size that leads to success, but the systems and policies that can channel that potential effectively. Paice also warns against relying on outdated or externally driven narratives that fail to capture Africa's diverse and dynamic realities. Therefore, fostering a deeper, more contextual understanding of these demographic trends is essential, focusing on creating systems that can harness the full potential of Africa's youth.<sup>14</sup>

### **Youth Ambition vs. State Capacity and National Security Implications**

According to a 2021 Afrobarometer survey, the aspirations of Africa's youth are immensely shaped by priorities such as employment, health, education, and infrastructure. Despite a clear awareness of these needs, African youth frequently encounter substantial obstacles in realizing their ambitions. The unemployment rate among youth is significantly higher compared to older age groups, reflecting a gap in employment opportunities and economic integration.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the lower levels of political engagement and voter participation among young

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<sup>11</sup> Cristiano Volpi, "The Youthquake in Africa: A Continent on the Rise". *Africa24.it* (2024), <https://africa24.it/en/2024/06/05/the-youthquake-in-africa-a-continent-on-the-rise/>

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Ezugwu Onodi, "Youthquake and Public Accountability of Emerging Leadership in Developing Economy", *Department Of Accounting, College Of Management Sciences, Michael Okpara University Of Agriculture* (n. D.), <https://cnaj.anan.org.ng/downloads/15edf52e5483f22999fdcb6d1d3d11c8.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> "Unemployment rate," *Central Intelligence Agency* (n. D.) <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/unemployment-rate/country-comparison/>

<sup>14</sup> Martin Mulligan, "Youthquake: Why African Demography Should Matter to the World". *The Round Table*, (2022): *111* (5), 647–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2022.2130628>

<sup>15</sup> Gildfred Boateng Asiamah et al., "Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth", *Civil Society Organisations African Governance Platform Project* (2021), <https://africanlii.org/akn/gh/doc/briefing-paper/2021-11-03/africans-say-governments-arent-doing-enough-to-help-youth/eng@2021-11-03/source.pdf>

people often result in their needs being inadequately addressed by existing policies.<sup>16</sup> This disconnection showcases the necessity for enhanced youth participation in policy-making processes to align governmental actions more closely with the aspirations of the younger population.<sup>17</sup>

African governments face significant challenges in effectively addressing the ambitions of their youth populations. Despite acknowledging youth-related issues as critical societal problems, many states struggle with engaging youth directly in governance and decision-making.<sup>18</sup> According to Afrobarometer, a considerable portion of youth perceive their governments as failing to adequately address pressing issues such as job creation and educational reform.<sup>19</sup> The limited direct involvement of youth in policy-making processes exacerbates this issue, resulting in a disconnect between youth expectations and government actions. This gap stresses the need for developing more inclusive governance frameworks that actively involve youth in shaping policies that affect their future.<sup>20</sup>

Infrastructure and governance issues further complicate the ability of states to meet the ambitions of their youth. Institutional weaknesses and ineffective policy implementation hinder progress in addressing youth needs. South Africa had previously taken steps to engage the youth in the development of a “youth policy,” which aimed to expand education opportunities and promote better economic participation among the younger population. Despite setting ambitious targets, the country faced challenges due to poor implementation at local levels. The lack of genuine youth participation in policy development often leads to ineffective or misaligned policies. This fragmentation and the predominance of government-led initiatives showcase the need for more inclusive and effective governance structures to address gaps in infrastructure and policy implementation.<sup>21</sup>

This gap in governance model can be exploited by the non-state actors and state actors. It has the potential to create political instability, economic insecurity, food insecurity, and less opportunities for youth. Non-state actors can easily exploit this for their own gains. They can easily recruit unemployed youth to their organization.

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<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Akwetey, “Youth and Political Development: Deploying Youth Capacities, Confronting the Challenge”, *Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG)* (2006), <https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ADF/ADF5/issuepaper.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Gildfred Boateng Asiamah et al., “Africans say governments aren’t doing enough to help youth”, Civil Society Organisations African Governance Platform Project (2021), <https://africanlii.org/akn/gh/doc/briefing-paper/2021-11-03/africans-say-governments-arent-doing-enough-to-help-youth/eng@2021-11-03/source.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## **Leadership and Security Challenges**

Leadership failures across many African countries have notably contributed to youth frustration. A significant portion of the youth perceive that their governments have been ineffective in addressing critical needs, particularly in employment and education. This perception of inadequate leadership has led to increasing demands for alternative forms of governance as youth seek more responsive and inclusive leadership. The growing discontent reflects a broader dissatisfaction with the existing political framework and highlights the need for leadership that more effectively addresses the concerns of the youth.<sup>22</sup> The response to perceived leadership failures has, in some instances, manifested in violent extremism and unrest. A bigger challenge is that violent extremist groups understand young people better than the state in many parts of the Sahel. This allows them to mobilize, exploit, and weaponize the pervasive grievances of the youth for recruitment and attacks.<sup>23</sup>

In many cases, violent extremist groups recognize the underlying frustrations that government institutions either fail to address or inadvertently exacerbate. These groups position themselves as alternative sources of empowerment by capitalizing on grievances related to unemployment, corruption, and political exclusion. This is especially dominant in regions with weak or absent state governance. The failure to deliver on basic needs, such as access to education and employment, leaves young people feeling neglected. Violent extremist organizations often provide the illusion of empowerment, framing their cause as a solution to systematic neglect, which appeals to disaffected youth seeking a sense of belonging and purpose.<sup>24</sup>

A study by the UNDP *Journey to Extremism I and II* highlights the extreme challenges and conditions young people face on the continent. The study uncovers that instead of support, many governments are in the way of young people, creating obstacles that undermine youth's capacity to flourish, pushing millions into poverty, drugs, and crime. This reality has a proclivity to accelerate youth recruitment into violent extremist groups.<sup>25</sup> Historical examples,

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<sup>22</sup> Gildfred Boateng Asiamah et al., "Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth", *Civil Society Organisations African Governance Platform Project* (2021), <https://africanlii.org/akn/gh/doc/briefing-paper/2021-11-03/africans-say-governments-arent-doing-enough-to-help-youth/eng@2021-11-03/source.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Alcinda Manuel Honwana, "Youth Struggles: From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter & Beyond", *African Studies Review* (2019): 62(1), 8–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.144>

<sup>24</sup> Araştırma Makalesi, "The Rising Trends of Violent Extremism in West Africa: A Threat to Regional Security", *Uluslararası İlişkiler Çalışmaları Dergisi* (2022): 2(2), 111-131. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2565010>

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Journey to Extremism in Africa" (2023), [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/JOURNEY%20TO%20EXTREMISM%20IN%20AFRICA%20PATHWAYS%20TO%20RECRUITMENT%20AND%20DISENGAGEMENT\\_2023.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/JOURNEY%20TO%20EXTREMISM%20IN%20AFRICA%20PATHWAYS%20TO%20RECRUITMENT%20AND%20DISENGAGEMENT_2023.pdf)

such as the Arab Spring and recent crises in the Sahel, illustrate how youth frustrations with ineffective leadership can lead to increased political and security challenges. These cases demonstrate the consequence of leadership failures, stressing the importance of addressing youth grievances to prevent unrest.<sup>26</sup>

Socio-economic deprivation is the primary condition that makes violent extremist groups like Boko Haram thrive in northern Nigeria, with high levels of poverty and youth unemployment combined with political disenfranchisement. Despite Nigeria's wealth in natural resources, the region's widespread poverty contributes to a fertile ground for radicalization. This is exacerbated by the scarcity of economic opportunities, particularly for young people, youth unemployment, and high levels of perceived corruption among government officials - creating an atmosphere ripe for social unrest. Extremist groups exploit these conditions, positioning themselves as an alternative to the state that promises action and change where the government is perceived to have failed. While Ghana is not yet on the same scale of violent extremism compared to that of its neighboring countries, many of the underlying factors that fuel extremism is present. Youth unemployment, poverty, social inequalities, and corruption persist in various country regions. These issues, if not addressed, create an enabling environment for extremist ideologies to take root. While Ghana has so far avoided large-scale Islamist extremism, political vigilantism, chieftaincy conflicts, and ethnic tensions reveal underlying vulnerabilities. Extremist groups operating in neighboring countries could seek to exploit these tensions, particularly as Ghana shares borders with countries facing significant extremist violence and terrorism.<sup>27</sup>

The continued rise of extremist violence in West Africa displays the transnational nature of these security challenges. Extremist groups, not confined by borders, seek to exploit local grievances, requiring regional cooperation and coordinated security responses.<sup>28</sup> Ghana faces a rising threat of violence, particularly given the current deteriorating security situation in neighboring country such as Burkina Faso. Recent incidents, such as the August 2023 attack near Barsalogo in Burkina Faso, have heightened concerns about extremist violence.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Alcinda Manuel Honwana, "Youth Struggles: From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter & Beyond", *African Studies Review* (2019): 62(1), 8–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.144>

<sup>27</sup> Araştırma Makalesi , "The Rising Trends of Violent Extremism in West Africa: A Threat to Regional Security", *Uluslararası İlişkiler Çalışmaları Dergisi* (2022): 2(2), 111-131. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2565010>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> David Lewis, "Al Qaeda branch says it killed 300 fighters, not civilians, in Burkina Faso attack", *Reuters* (2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/al-qaeda-branch-says-it-killed-300-fighters-not-civilians-burkina-faso-attack-2024-08-29/>.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that goes beyond military intervention and tackles the root causes of youth frustration.

### **Economic and Political Struggles**

Youth discontent with democratic processes is increasingly prevalent throughout Africa, with many young individuals viewing existing demographic structures as insufficient in meeting their needs, especially concerning critical areas such as employment and education.<sup>30</sup> This growing dissatisfaction highlights the urgent need for democratic reforms that more effectively cater to the aspirations of young citizens. It portrays the limitations of current democratic institutions in fulfilling youth expectations. National youth policies, such as South Africa's National Youth Policy of 1997, have been established to encourage youth engagement in policy-making and democratic development. Nevertheless, many youths remain disenchanting despite these initiatives, often feeling excluded from substantial decision-making processes. This perception of failure exacerbates youth frustrations and impedes overall development and political stability.<sup>31</sup>

A significant factor contributing to this disillusionment is the lack of viable opportunities for political engagement. While global advocacy frameworks such as the African Union's Youth Charter aimed to empower young people, they have not fully resonated with African youth.<sup>32</sup> Many young people, especially from higher education backgrounds, tend to gravitate toward market-based solutions rather than relying on political frameworks to solve their challenges. This is evident in the "brain drain" phenomenon, where university graduates and highly skilled youth seek better opportunities abroad, further compounding the challenges of youth unemployment and underemployment within their home countries. For those who remain, the unofficial employment sector has become an alternative pathway to address their needs independently, as public sector opportunities are limited. While a small fraction of highly educated youth finds roles in the public or private sectors where they can influence policy, the scope of their impact is limited. In many cases, these individuals are seen more as representatives of institutional interests than as advocates for their generation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gildfred Boateng Asiamah et al., "Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth", Civil Society Organisations African Governance Platform Project (2021), <https://africanlii.org/akn/gh/doc/briefing-paper/2021-11-03/africans-say-governments-arent-doing-enough-to-help-youth/eng@2021-11-03/source.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Akwetey, "Youth and Political Development: Deploying Youth Capacities, Confronting the Challenge", *Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG)* (2006), <https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ADF/ADF5/issuepaper.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Gedion G. Jalata, "Challenges and Opportunities of Youth in Africa". *The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa* (2014), *12*(6), 537–542. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/5518fba0c665.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Country-level approaches to youth participation also reveal differences. While in South Africa, civil society organizations have facilitated youth involvement in policy formulation, showing promise for a more inclusive governance model, countries like Sierra Leone and Angola have seen less success with government approaches that often marginalize youth and reinforce traditional power dynamics. Ghana's role of controlled participation, while seeking to incorporate youth in public decision-making, has similarly faced challenges in promoting real democratic engagement and addressing youth priorities.<sup>34</sup>

The overarching challenge remains in effectively incorporating the perspectives of young individuals into the decisions that shape their economic and social futures. For effective democratic governance to be successful, it is essential that leaders and political entities genuinely commit to public service and remain attentive to the diverse needs of all citizens.<sup>35</sup> For democracy to thrive, leadership must prioritize the needs of the people rather than merely seeking power or favorable electoral results.

## **Policy Recommendations for Youth Empowerment**

The dual nature of Africa's demographic, presenting opportunities and challenges, urges governments, regional bodies, and international partners to adopt proactive policies to address social and economic disparities while strengthening economic empowerment, political inclusion, education, and security. The following policy recommendations are designed to align with the 3E framework and provide actionable solutions to transform Africa's youth into sustainable drivers of development.

- **Empower**

- 1. *Strengthen Political Participation and Civic Engagement for Youth*

Political inclusion of all societal groups is necessary for long-term stability, as young people feel a greater sense of agency in shaping their future. In this way, they become stakeholders in the system and less likely to become part of the activities which are against national security of state. Therefore, governments need to facilitate opportunities for youth to participate in policy-making, creating a more inclusive governance framework.

- **Establishment of Youth Advisory Councils within Government Structures**

Creating advisory councils at local and national levels offers young people a platform to actively participate in decision-making on issues that directly affect their lives, such as employment, healthcare, and education. These councils provide a formal mechanism to bring

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

youth perspectives into governance, fostering a more inclusive and accountable system that better reflects the needs of younger generations. When participating in these councils, youth can gain first-hand experience in civic processes, which prepares them for future leadership roles. It also encourages a stronger sense of accountability and responsibility among younger demographics in shaping their communities.

- **Introduction of Youth Representation Quotas in Legislative Bodies**

To ensure the adequate representation of youth in legislative structure, governments can implement quota system. In this way, youth will not stay out of decision making process. Moreover, their presence in legislative bodies will make legislation as well as decision making process inclusive. Adopting this approach will promote an inclusive model of governance and legislation, which will have input of all generations. This will also create opportunities for emerging leaders to create a political landscape which is inclusive. It will also give them hope that they can change their future through political process. They will less likely to adopt an extremist approach to bring change.

## ***2. Develop Community-Based Security and Counter-Extremism Initiatives***

Those regions where extremism and terrorism is a challenge, government should provide alternative to youth so that they do not adopt radical ways to bring change. One alternative is the community based program for security and counter extremism. When communities will be involved in this process then space for terrorist organization is going to decline.

- **Creation of Community Centers Focused on Youth Engagement and Development**

Community centers that offer sports, arts, and skill-building programs provide young people with constructive outlets and a safe space for personal growth. They can play a pivotal role in helping youth develop new skills, form social connections, and share meaningful experiences within their communities. By fostering a sense of belonging and purpose, community centers promote positive engagement and act as a counter to extremist narratives, empowering youth to contribute positively to society.

- **Implementation of Mentorship Programs for Youth in Vulnerable Regions**

The government can also provide mentorship to students in vulnerable regions which are effected by terrorism and extremism. They can provide comprehensive guidance to students related to all domains of their lives. These mentors can provide meaningful advice to youth in matters related to jobs and education. For instance, they can help students in choosing the right career, which aligns with the requirements of future job markets. In this way, they can become

useful in ensuring that after education youth population does not become vulnerable to unemployment, which can make them an easy target of terrorist and extremist organizations.

- **Educate**

1. ***Align Educational Systems with Labor Market Demands***

Education plays a critical role in empowering youth. Educated youth can not only transform life of their family but also life of the whole community. To make role of education more effective in transforming the society, it should be aligned with the needs of job market. If education is not aligned with the needs of job market, then educated youth with no job opportunities can be more dangerous and can become an easy target of extremist organizations. Therefore, it is imperative that education aligns with need of job market.

- **Incorporation of Practical and Technical Training within Secondary Education**

There is need to reform the school's curriculum. The government can integrate skill based education into the curriculum. The government should train student in the fields of artificial intelligence, technology, health care, machine learning, and other relevant fields. Integrating skill based education in curriculum will not only provide more job opportunities to student but also it is going to have a positive impact on the economic situation of a state. Because availability of skill labor can help a state in increasing its exports, and it can bring revenue which can be invested on development. This approach can strengthen relationship between state and people. Hence, it can become an effective tool against extremism and terrorism.

- **Strengthening of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and Digital Education**

STEM education, along with digital literacy, is becoming increasingly vital in an ever-evolving, technology-driven global landscape. Collaborations between governments and external technology firms can offer youth valuable training in coding, data analysis, and digital skills, positioning young Africans to compete in international markets and preparing them for the future. The presence of these programs in school curricula, especially in rural areas, will help foster innovation and problem-solving skills at a young age. Thereby, the expansion of access to digital education in rural areas will bridge a digital divide, giving all youth the skills necessary to thrive in the modern workforce. Furthermore, this is likely strengthening the social contract between state and people. As a result, the young population less likely to become part of extremist organization.

## **2. Establish Sustainable International Partnerships**

Considering the scale of challenges confronting African youth, international partnerships are essential for establishing effective knowledge-sharing models and mobilization of resources.

- **Building Long-Term Partnerships with International Organizations (IOs)**

Developing collaborations with organizations, such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), and World Bank, is important for accessing resources, expertise, and an international network. These partnerships should prioritize capacity building within African institutions to empower them to independently implement, manage, and sustain youth programs in the long term. Through workshops, training, and joint research, knowledge-sharing can be strengthened, equipping all parties with best practices and tools tailored to the regional context. Further, ongoing dialogue with IOs can help address emerging challenges by providing access to support systems and networks that align with local development goals.

- **Integration of Strict Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for Accountability and Transparency**

Implementing comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is critical to ensure that international funding is effective and aligns with the objectives of youth programs. Such systems should allow for continuous assessment of program outcomes, identify potential challenges in the early stages, and showcase successful strategies. By optimizing resource allocation, this approach ensures investments are channeled toward initiatives that have demonstrated success and high potential for sustainable impact.

- **Strengthening of Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity**

Reliable digital infrastructure is crucial for empowering youth by facilitating access to education and remote job opportunities. Setting up internet access points within public infrastructure, such as community centers and libraries, can help bridge the digital divide in areas where internet availability is limited. In many regions, a lack of affordable and reliable internet access hinders young people from fully utilizing digital resources. Governments should, therefore, prioritize investments in expanding internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas, to support the inclusion of young people from marginalized communities. By collaborating with tech companies, governments can also build on training opportunities that equip youth with digital skills, covering topics ranging from basic digital literacy to advanced areas like web development and cybersecurity.

- **Employ**

- 1. ***Increase Accessibility to Employment Opportunities and Support for Youth Entrepreneurship***

Unemployment remains one of the biggest challenges for African youth.<sup>36</sup> Addressing this issue will require job creation initiatives and increased support for entrepreneurial businesses.

- **Expansion of Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)**

SMEs create jobs, especially for young people. Governments can assist SMEs in critical sectors, such as agriculture, energy, and technology, which show high growth potential, by offering incentives such as tax breaks and grants. The support of enterprises in these fields has the potential to create stable job opportunities and contribute positively to the economic ecosystem.

- **Increase of Accessibility to Financial Resources for Youth Entrepreneurs**

A common hindrance for youth starting businesses is the lack of capital. The implementation of loan programs designed for youth, including low-interest rates and accessible terms, will strengthen the overall youth engagement in the economy. Moreover, microfinance initiatives targeted at rural youth can further reduce barriers to entrepreneurship. By connecting youth entrepreneurs with seasoned business professionals through a mentorship program, industry leaders can provide critical guidance and support, enhancing the likelihood of initial business success.

- **Promotion of Youth Innovation in High-Growth Sectors**

Industries, such as technology and green energy, have offered, over the past years, increased opportunities for youth-led innovation. The establishment of innovation hubs, which will grant young people access to resources, necessary equipment, and mentorship, will empower them to bring their ideas to fruition. Furthermore, partnerships with the private sector for internship placements and specialized job training can help facilitate the integration of youth into these sectors, equipping them with essential skills and networks to thrive in the economy.

## **Conclusion**

The youth demographic in Africa represents a pivotal moment for the continent's trajectory. There are significant opportunities for economic advancement, innovation, and social progress. Yet, these opportunities depend on the ability of governments to confront persistent issues such

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<sup>36</sup> Afrobarometer, "Africa's youth are more educated, less employed, and less politically engaged than their elders, Afrobarometer study shows" (2023), [https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/News-release\\_Africas-youth-more-educated-less-employed-less-engaged-Afrobarometer-16Nov2023-.pdf](https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/News-release_Africas-youth-more-educated-less-employed-less-engaged-Afrobarometer-16Nov2023-.pdf).

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as unemployment, political marginalization, and inadequate infrastructure. Without strategic investments in education, job creation, and substantial political inclusion, there is a growing risk that discontent among the youth will escalate, which could result in heightened instability and the proliferation of extremist groups, especially in vulnerable areas like the Sahel. Moving forward necessitates a collaborative approach from African governments and international allies to prioritize youth involvement. By adopting targeted policy recommendations following the 3E framework, such as expanding educational access, fostering youth engagement in governance, and building an inclusive digital infrastructure, Africa can leverage its demographic shift into a powerful driver of stability and progress, ensuring that its youth play a vital role in shaping the continent's future. This united commitment to change will empower Africa's young generation to drive sustainable development, address socio-economic challenges, and contribute to a more prosperous future for the continent.