

Revolutions and the Power of the Youth in Regime Configurations

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Abstract: Following a realisation by the youth that they were being discriminated against politically and economically by political systems despite their active role and numeric advantage, they have created alternative systems of raising their awareness with a potential for regime change. The discussion was inspired by the 2011 revolutions in North Africa. The discussion on political revolution drew its data from various literature and policy papers. It was underpinned by the theory of Youth Bulge which argues that the more idle youth converge, the more chances of discontent and ultimately political revolutions. The discussion established that the youth are already creating alternate sites for social and political intervention away from party politics in order to achieve successful revolutions and that rural youth are also a possible risk to staging of revolutions despite being common in urban areas. However, conflict is an inevitable part of governance.

Key words: Revolution • Regime configuration • Youth power • Youth discrimination • Regime change
• Protest

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the critical role and energetic involvement of the youth in the demonstrations, political violence and campaigns, it continues to be under-represented in the political establishments, political parties, political systems and decision-making processes in Zimbabwe. The youth do not feel amply represented or recognised either and prospects for political involvement usually remain inadequate. At the same time, the future and the perceptions of this youth generation will be significant for the future of the progressing change processes in Zimbabwe.

The Arab Spring of 2011, which the discussion prefers to call 'wind of change' elevated lots of optimism for a generational transformation, for an essential change and transformation of political structures, a replacement of deep-rooted power configurations and even for a social upheaval, creating new chances and options for the youth generation [1]. Especially the Tunisian revolution has been critical in the analysis and appreciation of the role and capacities of the youth the world-over. What happened in Tunisia has shaken most political leaders to an extent that the same leaders no longer trust

the youth. Whatever the youth endeavour to do is often defined as an attempt to change the government through illegal means and therefore crushed to the last person.

Therefore the discussion looked at the potential of the youth and their label as a potential revolutionary outfit, dangerous to the incumbent government. The discussion drew its data from various credible literature and policy papers from across the continent that was relevant in the activities of the youth vis-a-viz political revolutions. Precisely, while the discussion appreciates that there are various forms of revolutions, it focussed on the political aspect of it.

Background: What transpired in Africa in 2011 enthused a universal rusade hat has seen youth demonstrations burgeoning globally since then. The frenzy has spread as far as the Middle Eastern countries such as Yemen, Syria, Iran, Bahrain and Turkey, which encountered social turbulence instigated by youth demonstrations. In Portugal, the youth filled the streets to deprecate joblessness and the high cost of living [2, 3] while Chilean students took to the streets demandin gbetter quality, low budget public tuition. In Brazil thousands of youths planned demonstrations over scarce public amenities,

corruption and economic scandals. Most of the protests which successfully deposed longstanding leaders, are part of a broader movement of demonstrations all over the continent that has seen huge numbers of people, particularly the youth, going into the streets to disapproval the status quo. Compelled by a like grounds, street protest occurred in several countries including Djibouti, Gabon, Malawi, Mozambique, Cameroon, Libya, Nigeria, Angola, Sudan and Swaziland among others. Though numerous popular revolutions were in humanely suppressed and did not result in the fall of governments, it was apparent that the waves were whirling [4].

The youth in Zimbabwe constitute almost 67% of the entire population where over 70% of the people live in the rural areas [5]. Rural areas in Zimbabwe are heavily characterised by poverty, hunger, lack of industry for jobs and lack of basic social and economic facilities. Meanwhile youth unemployment in Zimbabwe oscillates between 94% and 96% as at 2017 [6] though Zimstat [7], says it is 11%. This is a direct contrast to the Arab world's highest youth unemployment rate of 25% [8]. Although this is an extremely trained generation, with several having academic credentials and university degrees, their credentials are usually not modified to the requirements and tasks of the hastily fluctuating labour markets and globalized economies.

Further to the political and demographic challenges and the complications in assimilating into the labour markets, the youth encounter several more impediments within society, which alienate them from real development and growth. Though the youth are in both urban and rural, it is those in the urban who are affected most and who are empowered to question and brave enough to confront the challenges and the authorities involved. Therefore, it is the urban youth who are subject of this discussion. It is such challenges and other political discrimination and abuses that have pushed the youth into delinquency and subject to employment as political revolutionaries. Resultantly, thousands of youth are on the verge of partaking in any political assignments provided they earn them some income as was noted during the 2002 and 2008 political elections and other economic protests including the 1998 Food Riots, 01 August 2018 and 14 January 2019 political protests [9]. This is not a new phenomenon, during the 1960s to 1979 liberation war in Zimbabwe, the youth were also politicized into joining a war that transformed the political space; transferring power from a white Zimbabwean Ian Smith to a black Zimbabwean Robert Mugabe [10].

Theoretical Explanation: The discussion is anchored on the theory of Youth Bulge by Gunnar Heinsohn [11]. Contextually, the theory posits that the more urbanized a community is when it experiences more unemployed youth keeping coming and yet development opportunities are closed, the more probable it seems to record high-intensity conflicts. It argues that in situations where fast urbanization includes rural-urban relocation by poorly-educated youth in pursuit of work, low urban employment and restricted emigration prospects may result in disappointments and revolutions [12].

The discussion appreciated the fact that more than half of the world population now lives in the urban areas. It also noted the projections of a continued rural-urban migration especially in Africa where more youth are expected to flock to the cities [13] thus widening chances of resource, employment and social service conflicts and subsequent protests and revolutions. The theory is relevant to the discussion because it seeks to explain and relate what is happening in Zimbabwe to what other countries have gone through in terms of youth politics, governance and the general youth response to their grievances and expectations.

Analysis

Revolutions: A number of revolutions have ensued all through human history. Most of them especially those that occurred during and after the resurgence of contemporary radical ideologies from the 16th century are more or less driven by revolutionary notions propounded by some prominent intellectuals. John Milton, the 17th century author, believed that revolutions were a right of society to protect itself while Immanuel Kant, the 18th century German thinker, understood a revolution as a movement for the development of humanity [14].

A political revolution according to Cha abani [15] is an occurrence which results in an important political transformation related with the development of economic and socio-cultural modification. This occurrence usually takes place abruptly and is executed by a huge group of people who usually apply violence and are frequently connected to philosophy and directed by some leaders. Understood differently, a revolution is a national demonstration that results in the defeat of government [16]. Usually a revolution takes time to brew as noted in the Egyptian case where the 2010 revolution had its roots way back in 2004 when various political movements rejected the inheritance of political power from father, Hosni Mubarak, to son, Gamal, of the National Democratic Party [17]. Again the 2019 Sudan revolution has its

genesis in 2018 when then President Bashir's government forced emergency austerity mechanisms in a bid to stave off economic ruin.

In the history of modern politics, there have been various revolutions. However, since 2011, the rate of revolution occurrence and the gravity of their impacts have been prodigious and unprecedented. The world observed as protests in Tunisia got to a climax, deposing the despotic administration of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. The demonstrations broke out after 26-year-old vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire outside a local government building in December 2010 in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid. This was after powers that behad overtly chastened him and took away his vegetable stand [18, 19]. Similarly, Senegalese youth took to the streets, fought with police and succeeded to halt the endorsement of constitutional adjustments that would benefit former president Wade in 2011 [20, 21].

In September 2010 in Maputo, thousands of Mozambican youth engaged in unrests against the government remonstrating the increase in prices of basic needs like bread, water and fuel. The angry youth congested the streets, burned tyres and challenged the police who attempted to scatter the crowds. The police injured numerous youth and more than ten died [22]. In October 2014 large numbers of Burkina be youth took to the streets to demand the end of President Blaise Compaore's 27-year-rule. Campaore was also busy on a constitutional adjustment to permit him to contest for a third term.

Following the wind of change that had started in North Africa, some Middle Eastern states such as Iran, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Turkey encountered serious public disturbances triggered by youth protests. Similarly, Portugal's youth went into the streets disparaging joblessness and the high cost of living [23]. The strife in Sudan in 2019 also followed reductions to bread and fuel subsidisations and a general deterioration in living standards before the rage spread to the capital, Khartoum.

The trend set by the recent set of revolutions has left several leaders in panic mode [24]. They have completely changed the terrain politically and managed to transform the mind-set traditionally fixed in the minds of the generality of the masses that leaders are infallible and irreplaceable. By nature, revolutions change everything including infrastructural outlook as the youth destroy everything along their path.

Drivers of Revolutions: All the revolutions have largely been managed and led by the youth owing to the following; their levels of energy, their levels of flexibility,

being at the centre of most challenges, their ability to be mobilised and their manipulability amongst others. However, there are other external factors that drive the youth to engage in these transformative processes [25]. Various scholars and political analysts proffer various influences that are however determined by cultures, economies and political and religious philosophies among others.

Researchers have scrutinised the effect of globalization on youth lives, accentuating the manner globalization processes are facilitated by age and generation [26]. It is noted that generally globalisation changes people's lives either ways. In the case of the youth, the changes are usually negative and destructive so much so that, as a response, the youth find themselves conflicting with their surrounding environments. During the process, they also lay the blame on the government before they embark on a process to remove them from the office.

There are numerous whinges that might have developed over years both in the common people and other formal organisations. Unfortunately, most of the whinges do find themselves affecting the youth most. When grievances develop over time and left unattended, they firm up and create social, political and economic problems for the people around particularly the youth. Some of the grievances within the youth include economic suffering, joblessness, apparent ignominy and denial of basic freedoms [27]. Protest actions, commanded mostly by youth, emanate straight from the economic and social stresses they agonise and from their inescapable political ostracism. As a result the youth are migrating from detached and amorphous social and political actions into more structured street demonstrations [28].

There is also serious discontentment over discrimination, injustice [29], the absence of professional prospects and the subsequent on-existence of opportunities in their private lives [30]. There are cases where the youth feel alienated when it comes to crucial opportunities for either employment, decision-making or economic empowerment. The cases of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia and Portugal's youth are immediate examples of alienation and discrimination. It is unfortunate that African youth constitute a subjugated majority, mainly left out from key socio economic establishments and political processes [31].

Urban Settlement as a Driver of Protests: The discussion has noted above that while revolutions are generally national processes that are executed by almost any youth, they are mainly engineered and steered by youth in urban

areas chiefly because they feel the discrimination, alienation, hardships and poverty first and more than the youth in the rural areas. The advent of various social communications also help the youth to broadcast their grievances and plans. Besides, most ruling political parties manipulate the rural communities more than they would in urban areas. The study deliberately avoids describing rural youth as 'naïve and docile'. The discussion also notes that more than half of the world's population now lives in cities as submitted by Cockayne, *et al.* [32]. 90% of the upsurge is anticipated in Asia and Africa [33]. The implication is that more youth are getting into urban areas thus creating more chances of conflicts with the governing administrations. Some scholars talk about youth bulges developing in urban areas. Contrary to pre-colonial and colonial times when youth in the rural areas would be recruited for liberation wars and protests; where they were abused and used blindly, in the contemporary times, the urban youth initiate and run their protests. They seek to emancipate themselves from the various vices; poverty, hunger, joblessness and lack of basic social and economic facilities. These are some of the factors that have fuelled illegal migration across Africa.

The concentration of power, people and profit in urban areas generates prospects for viable and non-violent development. But urbanization also upsets established agendas and power equilibriums, shifting a society's economic geography and political economy by shifting influence away from rural people, towards developed, commercial and urban players, unsettling recognised social establishments and altering identities [34]. Inexorably, these economic, social and political fluctuations are questionable and that contestation can create conflict, including conflict over how urban areas and their inhabitants ought to be administered. More conflicts could also be over who ought to establish the standards by which limited resources are distributed and security and public amenities provided.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that rapid urbanization is posing colossal governance challenges. This is worrying, because swift urbanization is common in delicate and conflict affected countries. However, it should be realised that there are researchers who argue that the relationship between urbanization, strife, violence and revolution is multifaceted [35, 36]. They claim that revolutions in urban areas are heterogeneous, not consistently characterised and do not connect in any direct way to population size or urban layout [37]. Notwithstanding this heterogeneity, three aspects appear predominantly noteworthy to comprehend the connection between urbanization and revolutions.

Some studies talk about demographic stressors. This implies the advent of an enormous jobless youth population that appears to generate dangers of political turmoil and vicious political struggle [38]. Most of such youth end up engaged either in street gangs or other various forms of delinquency that eventually harden them into criminals, a precondition for ideal revolutionaries. Similarly, in circumstances where quick urbanization includes rural-urban migration by poorly-educated young men and women in search of work, inappropriate employment and restricted emigration prospects could result in frustration and strife [39]. This is because there will be unprecedented levels of pressure on limited resources in the cities compared to the needy youth.

Most evolutions start as social violence, strife, or what is usually called demonstration. Whether such violence progresses into more unrelenting and structured political violence, sustainable conflict management measures have to be adopted. These measures may include governance-related elements, particularly the capability of state players to manage urbanization by giving increasing populations access to means of support, socio-economic facilities, housing stock and security and infrastructure [40]. What happens in instances when state capability to rule is feeble is that other, non-state groups might appear with governmental authority over local communities, residents and marketplaces [41]. This may ultimately result in grievances that lead to revolutions.

The subtleties of urban initiated revolutions have been fashioned by premeditated contact between official political players and casual non-state players brandishing violence as part of a local, informal governmental stratagem [42]. This shows the importance of networks and collaboration in planning successful revolutions. Closely akin to the networks and collaborations aspects, some scholars posit that socio-economic disparity, particularly between religious, ethnic or geographic groups also play an invaluable role in the revolutions' planning and subsequent execution [43, 44]. There is also some research proposing that the propinquity of communities with observable expenditure it uncongruence seem to pressure social relationships in ways that result in revolutions [45, 46, 47]. Similarly, disparities in individual and group familiarities of the urban built environment, that is the physical substructure of their communities, can as well encourage involvement in revolutions [48]. Inter-group underlying forces are therefore fundamental to understanding how urbanization leads to grievances and subsequent revolutions.

Youth Uprisings in Zimbabwe: Revolutions in Eastern Europe were certainly not copiously organic, nor were they, notwithstanding their depiction, merely expressions of people authority. They were in fact externally sponsored and to a substantial magnitude foreign activated. Youth movements and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have also been involved as agents for government change. These are the views shared by Mackinnon [49]. They are similar to several others that believe that youth are so naïve and docile that they cannot determine their future and sieve the good from the bad. If Mackinnon has a point, then it may not be every youth.

In the case of Zimbabwe, there have been various uprisings especially after the 1980 political change-over of power. The most notable ones include the 1985 political conflict dubbed 'Operation Perm', the 1995 general workers' strike where thousands of youth were at the centre of the protest and the 1998 Food riots where again, the urban youth led the protests over food shortages. Again in 1999, a youth movement including students were pivotal in protests and conferences that culminated into the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change political party [50]. Major protests for land in Zimbabwe from 2000 were anchored on the strength of the youth especially those in the rural areas. In-between 2000 and 2010, there have been several youth led protests especially in the main urban areas of Zimbabwe with the 2007 Final Push being the main. The protests have been over rising levels of unemployment, poverty and escalating prices of basic commodities and non-action by government to address the deteriorating economic and political situation [51, 52]. Other important youth led protests were recorded in August 2018 and January 2019 over alleged rigged elections and a hike in fuel prices respectively [53]. Not all the protests were targeted at out-right removal of the government. Some only served to remind, reprimand and revitalise governance approaches. However the Final Push, 01 August 2018 and the 14 January 2019 protests were designed along the Tunisian style and definitely meant to depose the incumbent government.

What is observable in all the protests in Zimbabwe is that the youth have initially in the 1980s into the 1990s been more peaceful and tolerant. Their approach has gradually changed seeing the youth take up light weapons like stones, logs and burning tyres among others [54]. The youth representing various social, economic and political interests were really the force behind the demonstrations that whirled across the

country over the period. The only notable difference between protests in Zimbabwe and those recorded in North Africa is that the incumbent regime in Zimbabwe was not removed; it was so ruthless that it prevented an over-run of the systems. The Zimbabwean regime applied a firm level of control on systems of political expression, mainly through the state's tough security machinery; Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). With the advent of globalisation, more media sources have been availed to the youth who have in turn accessed what more radical youth elsewhere are doing and using to take down an unresponsive government. The same social media has also allowed them to communicate, share strategies and make updates on protest developments across the country [55].

While official state media in Zimbabwe played the valuable role of determining public information in the past, its believability has gnarled in a more open media space. In an anomalous language of illogicality, Zimbabweans consider the reverse message of what could be conveyed in the state media. Zimbabweans, particularly internet-savvy youth, have always wanted a political say. Change however needs a critical mass eager to act and to cover their fears. Social media has thus unlocked a space for political engagement and activism that was taking a sluggish yet trans formative conclusion. Activists use phones to stream live recording of political action on the streets and to create permanent record of police abuses. Further than being a medium of communication, the internet is used to closely observe and organise demonstrations and masses' organisation [56]. Meanwhile the blogosphere in Zimbabwe has stretched out the ground of expression for traditional media be sides playing an additional responsibility of being a media supervisory body.

The protests in Zimbabwe have been met with severe reprisals. The state has played double standards, on paper allowing people all the freedoms as enshrined in the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013 whereas when it comes to action on the ground then the youth encounter deleterious consequences. The youth in Egypt call it the liberty to say and not the right to practically do; people are allowed to express what they desire but not permitted to do what they say [57, 58].

Religion and social mores are applied as expedient covers by dictatorial governments, helping to protect their rule and defend them from censure. There are some practices that the Regimes in Zimbabwe (Mugabe and

Mnangagwa) do not allow and are characterised as bad morally and evil religiously. The right to protest by the youth has since the assumption of power by the Mnangagwa regime been considered immoral and unacceptable.

Averting Potential Revolutions: Revolutions are naturally bad for the governments in power. History has shown that some power has changed hands owing to revolutions. In Zimbabwe, the liberation war of the 1970s was mainly waged by the youth and most governance protests in South Africa are also sustained by youth movements. Therefore, it is prudent that they at all cost be avoided. Averting a revolution in Zimbabwe could take various methods including an improvement in governance and taking on board the voice of the youth in development and decision-making processes.

Even as the state cracks down on the media, the public is becoming more informed, public debate heightened and there is an expectation of hearing different perspectives and viewpoints. It is crucial that all the citizens including the youth be afforded an ear in issues of development and decision-making. The youth as a majority constituent in Zimbabwe demographically, needs to be accorded an appropriate position in all governance matters. It may also be necessary to create some quota in the allocation of facilities and privileges. They are an important group that has the capacity to create turmoil if badly managed.

The discussion also realised the need for respect for human rights and the rule of law, more democratic representation and an end to the immoral totalitarianism that has long characterised Zimbabwean-style politics. Drawing from Robert Mugabe's style of governance, any other regime needs to endeavour to improve as a way of averting the fate that defined the end of Mugabe's government. Politically, there must be an improvement in the way the opposition political parties and the youth are treated.

In most cases, urban violence is confined to particular street corners. In the case of Harare, Angwa Street and Kwame Nkrumah, Fourth Street and Robert Mugabe, Rotten Row and Samora Machel and some known residential areas' spots in Budiro, Glen-View, Chitungwiza, Mabvuku and Kuwadzana are known to be protests' hot-spots. Therefore, averting protests and potential revolutions requires that all known hot-spots be closely monitored by the relevant authorities. Besides, there may be need to reconfigure the specific street corners so that whatever defines them and making them

ideal conflict and protest brewing spots is removed. If it is darkness, thick cover or public restrictions that allow the spots to be good for revolutions, then they have to be either renovated or restructured.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion sought to establish the place of the youth in regime configurations with particular reference to their capacity and preparedness to organize revolutions that can determine governance systems. The discussion noted from a variety of literature that revolutions are not a new phenomenon; having occurred elsewhere and leaving lots of casualties in the form of long time national leaders. Actually, the analysis was inspired by the 2011 'wind of change' in North Africa.

As a conclusion to the discussion, the youth are already creating alternate sites for social and political intervention away from party politics and inside civil society organisations. They relate and involve with movements and associations that involve political action without demanding party affiliation. They struggle for the liberty to express themselves in the physical and computer worlds. The discussion also concludes that further than the discrepancies in their physical, cultural and political circumstances, youth in opulent and poor countries are affected by like challenges of unemployment, a sense of marginalization and constrained prospects. The disappointment and demonstration potential of the youth keeps existing in spite of last minute efforts by incumbent regimes to attend to their demands before potentially disastrous revolutions.

While urban protest and dissension created political cataclysm and revolutions, it is concluded that rural youth are also a possible risk to staging of revolutions. Thus, even if historical civil wars have been predominantly rural matters, this might not help as worthy guidance for what revolutions over constitutional authority will appear in the future. The discussion concludes that though Africa is the least urbanized area, it is not astonishing that most protests are instigated in urban spaces. The explanation lies in the rate of rural-urban migration owing to poverty, globalisation, climate change and unemployment among others. It is also concluded that there is an affinity to seek to avert all protests and all revolutions in Zimbabwe and several other countries. However, conflict is an inexorable part of governance and of the casual political contestation in any country.

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