

Youth-led protests, Convergence and COVID-19



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“Youth Activism and Protest Around the Mediterranean”,
Routledge Handbook of the Mediterranean, R. Gillespie and F. Volpi, 2018.



Shared experiences

- Democratic deficits/authoritarianism
- Socio-economic exclusion
- Lack of trust in political elites
- Hyper-precarity

Shared strategies: Horizontalism

“Constituting themselves into organic voluntary associations of individual citizens, activists, bloggers, public communicators and community organisers striving to create new forms of political engagement, based on broad, decentralised, horizontal and consensus-based approaches to socio-political mobilisation”.

“However, so far, young people continue to avoid the structures and political ideologies that turn protest movements into formal political parties. They reject the established order based on doctrinaire, hierarchical and authoritarian models of mobilisation and participation as inadequate and corrupt. Their investment in novel technologies and new forms of mobilisation, deliberation and consensus-building stands as a self-conscious counter-point to multi-party politics, religious sectarianisms and dogmatic debates over representative democracy. While the horizontalist approach foregrounds the agency of youth and their capacity for creative and innovative engagement, its ‘rhizomatic’ nature makes it difficult to contend for political power within the current political landscape.”

(Alcinda Honwana, 2012)

Shared strategies: Formal politics



Shared strategies: Solidarities across borders

- Recognising their commonalities.
- Facilitated by the internet and social media..

Youth protest/mobilisation occupied spaces of dissidence (Auragh and Alexander, 2011) and resistance (Castells, 2012)

Mobilised youth exercised disruptive power but could not access structural power

- “Beyond the disparities in their material, cultural and political situations, young people in rich and poor countries are affected by similar problems of political and socio-economic exclusion, and restricted futures”.



Alcinda Honwana Honwana 27 November 2019, "Are Global Youth Protests Learning from the Arab Spring" LSE blog, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2019/11/27/are-global-youth-protests-learning-from-the-arab-spring>

Staying on the streets or recreational activism? (Alcinda Honwana vs Chiara Milan)



Algeria 2019



Italian 'sardines' in 2019

Impact of COVID 19 on Youth

- Educational journeys
- Employment opportunities
- Austerity futures (and lifetime of debt)
- Transitions (lost and deferred milestones, prolonged dependency or reversed independence, mental health).
- Negative narratives reproduced

Hirak – Algeria and the dilemma of the street

- “Since the coronavirus arrived in Algeria we heard that the marches could be in danger. Many activists hesitated at the beginning because they had made so much ground and there were so many of us – so it was hard to give up marching” (Sarah Elam).
- “The students decided to stop at the last minute, but the older activists wanted to continue marching on Friday (March 20th) and also Saturday (March 21st)”. (Yassa Ameur)
- “Our media is not good at raising awareness or spreading public information, so we shared information [about the virus] and reached out to people on-line” (Sarah Elam)

Lebanon – Sustaining the October Revolution



Free Youth protests Thailand 2020

Freedom House: Information Isolation Report 2020

Information Isolation: Censoring the COVID-19 Outbreak

100 DAYS
NO INTERNET

Share   

Governments are using the pandemic as a pretext to crack down on free expression and access to information.

15:32
01/04/2021



Political Failures

- Slow or inadequate government responses to the pandemic
- Corruption and cronyism
- Lost freedoms which compound the lack of trust in political elites
- Failures to co-ordinate a global response properly
- Shines a light on structural inequalities
- Impacts young people disproportionately
- Young people have common cause (BLM protests 2020, Climate change protests)

Youth Protests in 2020/21

- Protests that combine more than one issue or problem, multi-dimensional, seeing all issues as part of an overall systemic failure.
- Protests on the street, which self-consciously defy COVID restrictions, are protests against the Governments that impose them as much as the restrictions themselves
- Youth protests which are indicative of generational differences within countries
- Youth protests that demonstrate 'common cause' in favour of social justice, progressive politics and climate change
- Youth protesters who 'come out' for everything

Nothing more to lose but my wife....Brussels March 2021



Coming of Age?

“Over the past year, citizens in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East took to the streets to raise their voices against inequality, corruption and bad governance. And while from Italy to Iraq, and Venezuela to Zimbabwe they promoted wildly different slogans, the subtext was always the same: the system is not working. The youth at the forefronts of these movements are no longer to just push for change from the fringes of power. Increasingly they are taking the reins themselves, either through the democratic process or by spearheading protest movements that command the world’s attention”

Aryn Baker, “A New Generation of Leaders Inspired by Acitivist Movements is Driving Change Around the World”, Time Magazine.

