

Youth politics & civic space: From lockdown to crackdown

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Youth political participation

Progress

- Learning about barriers to accessing formal institutions and spaces for participation; voice and (gender) inclusion.
- From tokenistic to substantive and meaningful participation.
- International youth mobilization, e.g.:



The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security



Afrikki Network

Persistent myths

- Perceived youth apathy and disengagement (Habashi 2017).
- Dominant narrative on a direct and causal link from youth unemployment to violence and instability (Cramer 2010; Dowd 2017, Izzi 2015).
- Continuation of the binary of youth as ‘peace makers’ or ‘violent youth’ (Rasmussen & van Stapele 2020).

Youth politics in Sub Saharan Africa

- Youth participation in elections is lower than those aged 36 and above – length of party incumbency deters turnout (Resnick & Casale 2014).
- Youth protests ‘wax and wane’ and constituted no more than 32% of protests (Resnick 2019).
- Youth don’t protest *that* much more than adults (Resnick & Casale 2014; Resnick 2019)
- The youth label – Protests are not about ‘joblessness’, but broader governance issues.

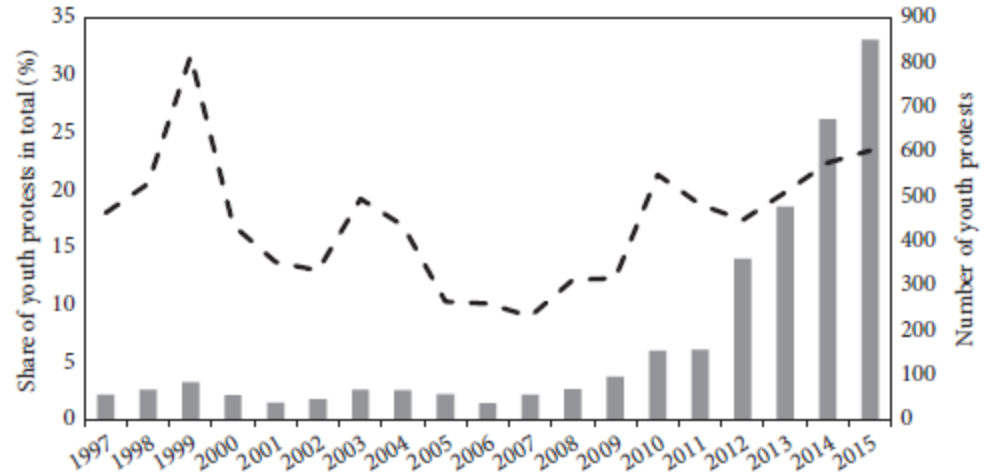


Figure 4.1. Youth protests over time in sub-Saharan Africa

D. Resnick (2019) 'Troublemakers, Bystanders, and Pathbreakers. The Political Participation of African Youth', p.78. - Chapter 9 in Open access e-book: Mueller & Thurlow (eds) 'Youth and jobs in rural Africa: Beyond stylized facts' – IFPRI.

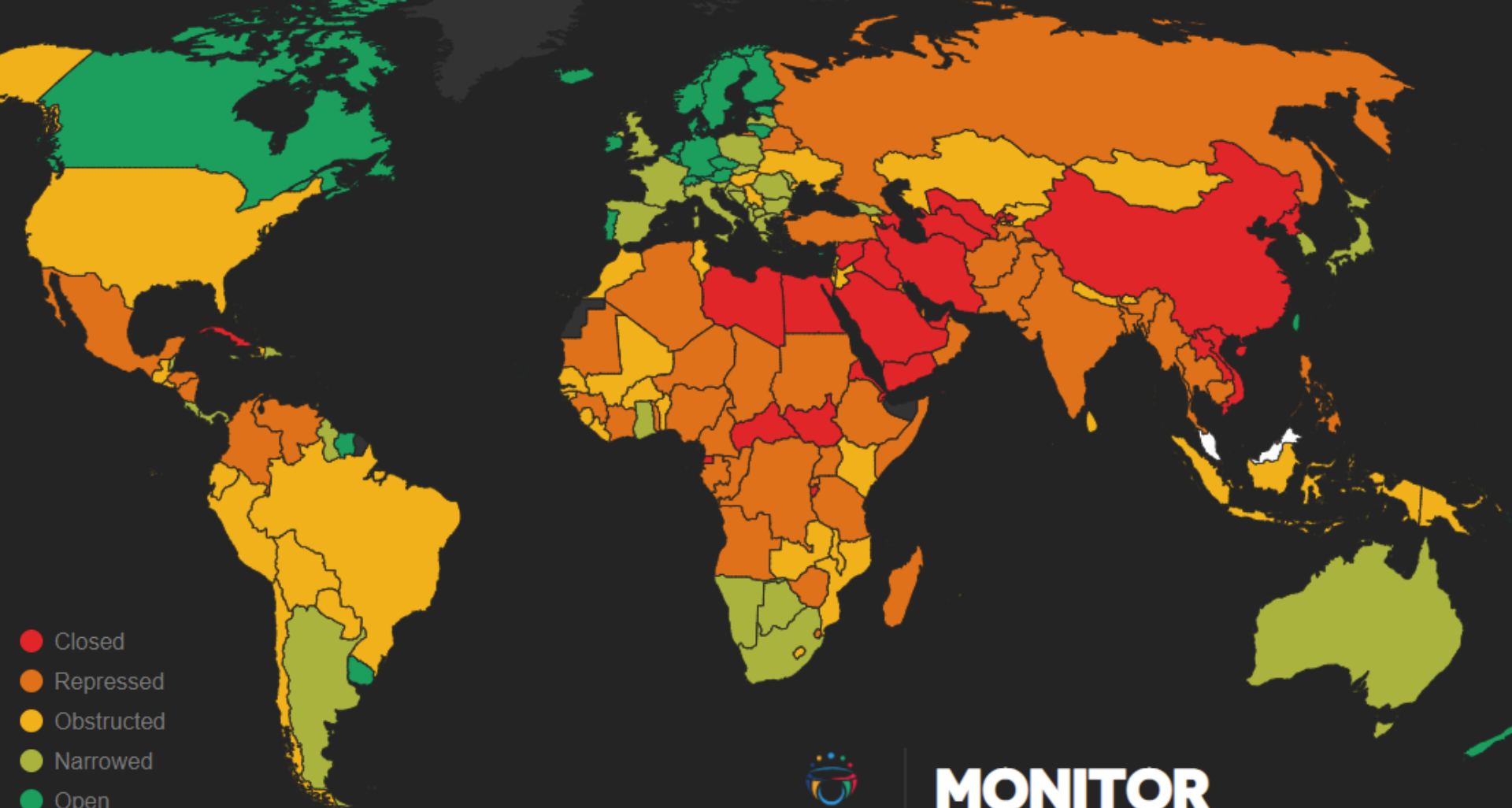
The importance of everyday engagement and action

Source: Devex- *Martine Perret* / UNMEER

- Young people take various forms of action and engage politically in everyday life, including for peace, (Kimari et al 2020; McEvoy Levy 2015; Turner 2015).
- Youth and Covid-19 responses (Honwana & Honwana, 2020 - Kujenga Amani)
- Youth diversity and social difference produce (gendered) barriers to civic and political action.
- Youth action and activism meet a range of political challenges, which vary across different political contexts.



Source: earthday



- Closed
- Repressed
- Obstructed
- Narrowed
- Open



MONITOR
TRACKING CIVIC SPACE

A world map with a color-coded overlay. The map shows various regions in shades of green, yellow, orange, and red. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the map, containing text. The map is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be clearly visible.

Civic space dynamics

- Formal legislation restricting civil society and (online) voices
- Violence, harassment, intimidation.
- Discourses legitimizing status quo and undermining the opposition/civil society.

(Brechenmacher 2017; Dupuy & Prakash 2017; Hossain et al. 2019).

- Covid-19 state of emergency, emergency laws, lockdown, increased power for security forces (Bethke & Wolf 2020; Jefferson et al. 2021).

Digital civic space

When freedoms and space for 'offline' action close, people find online spaces to express themselves.

When civic space opens online, governments take measures to close digital space:

- digital surveillance
- digital disinformation
- internet shutdowns
- legislation
- arrest for online speech

(Roberts & Mohamed Ali 2021)



Roberts, T. (2021) **Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries**, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2021.003

Open access: Country reports for Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Sudan, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Cameroon.

How states see (urban) youth

Potential opposition actors; *and* potential recruits/ supporters/ 'the youth vote' (Gebremariam 2020; Oosterom 2019).

Regimes that have large youth populations are more likely to use repression than other regimes (Nordas & Davenport 2013).



Source: bbc.com



Source: Uganda's NRM Youth Facebook page



Source: theafricareport.com

The politics of formal youth participation

In whose interests are youth interventions?

- National youth councils
- National Youth Funds

(Balcha Gebremariam 2020; Izzi 2020;
Reuss & Titeca 2017; Southall 2019)



Oosterom & Gukurume (2019), CMI project on youth employment and representation in Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

From lockdown to crackdown: Zimbabwe



Source: AP Photo, Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi

Harare clean-up campaign during lockdown, April 2020

The opposition-dominated City Council clears illegal market structures for hygiene purposes; and to cut out the ruling party 'brokers' who run stalls on behalf of the party and levy fees.

Project 'Learning on the streets – urban youth'. ESRC/IDS with Dr S. Gukurume, Dr. R. Mate, D. Mpofu and T. Chishiri.



Source: S Gukurume, IDS/ ESRC Project Learning on the Streets

Political learning and socialization

- Political learning through the family and from past and present everyday experiences.
- Experiences of violence deter political engagement.

“From 2007 up to now, there are lot things that took place politically. I saw people being jailed because of politics. I saw people’s business prosper because of politics... But also, I saw their downfall of because of politics. As a result of all this, I decided to distance myself from politics.”

“Politics and war go hand in hand. It is way better to stay far away from politics, because politics causes war and war is associated with casualties”



Source: S Gukurume, IDS/ ESRC Project Learning on the Streets

Everyday political expressions and actions

- Cope with adversity and help family and neighbours.
- Majority: highly critical about corruption, the overall economic situation, but...
- They avoid visible, confrontational forms of politics; informal workers comply with informal party rules. They engage in subtle forms of defiance; negotiating with police and security over freedoms.

About protests, young vendors said:

“Ah, those don’t work. If they worked, they would have changed some things. You can see how things are, man. Nothing has changed.”

“You end up being beaten. Protests are not good for business, few people come.”

31 July 2020

Protest planned about economic impacts of the strict lockdown, poverty and corruption. Perceived as potential threat as opposition parties, ruling party dissidents, journalists and some (online) activists joined hands and call for national protest.

Regime pre-empted by 'locking the city', and further arrests.

Limited action on the actual day.

No appetite for protest among the young vendors in our study, but online critical voices
#July31 #zimbabweanlivesmatter



Source: newzimbabwe.com

Concluding remarks

- Endorse a focus on everyday forms of action, but advance the analysis on the interaction between forms of action and violence/repression.
- Future research on youth politics: the dynamics between regimes and (urban) youth in diverse political settings.
- Implications of Covid-19 measures and restrictions on civic space for the young generations perceptions of governments, governance and engagement. E.g. the pandemic as 'critical event' (Sapiro 2008), and 'period effect' and 'generational effect' (Resnick 2019).

Thank you!

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Resnick (2019), using Afrobarometer round 6, 2014/15

Table 4.8. Protest by age groups in urban areas from Round 6 Afrobarometer (percentages)

Country	Age groups						Total	<i>Total urban observations</i>
	18–24	25–29	30–34	35–44	45–54	55+		
Botswana	10.34	7.77	8.03	13.11	11.31	6.46	9.54	760
Cape Verde	10.23	18.7	11.01	14.24	19.63	11.92	13.86	776
Ghana	9.28	7.83	8.14	8.84	4.84	4.82	7.54	1,304
Kenya	9.59	10.18	9.47	12.37	1.02	1.84	8.96	872
Lesotho	7.07	7.2	6.09	4.55	0.0	4.87	5.13	360
Malawi	8.56	16.34	9.35	10.57	0.0	5.11	9.46	448
Mali	34.26	20.36	27.54	23.2	18.84	7.88	23.48	304
Mozambique	9.68	9.51	7.79	12.26	4.24	9.4	9.33	840
Namibia	8.79	12.77	14.72	14.36	13.49	14.98	12.56	584
Nigeria	11.75	11.71	16.09	16.78	22.79	19.02	14.68	1,048
Senegal	19.36	16.98	20.85	19.23	11.79	2.72	15.63	592
South Africa	13.27	20.63	19.78	19.14	14.59	11.15	16.61	1,627
Tanzania	1.23	5.65	2.71	7.1	6.73	4.53	4.83	836
Uganda	6.46	13.78	9.6	4.21	7.11	3.06	7.72	448
Zambia	5.87	11.36	1.51	2.72	6.71	3.4	5.31	520
Zimbabwe	2.65	1.83	2.54	4.07	3.53	1.22	2.76	888