A Hidden African Revolution?

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Anguka Nayo (drop with it) has become one of the main slogans of the waves of protest that have unsettled power relations within Kenya, forced the president's cabinet to dissolve, and intensified calls for the president's resignation. Facing the pressures of this non-violent movement, the most recent protests have been violently suppressed, leading to the deaths of more than 30 people and numerous "disappearances." This has led to critical questions about the underlying drivers of these protests, western influence, and their security implications for the African community at large.

The protests were driven by dissatisfaction with the 2024 finance bill, which proposed taxes disproportionately affecting middle- and lower-class consumers. These taxes have made life extremely difficult, with basic

commodities becoming increasingly expensive, exacerbating the economic strain on the population. President Ruto justified these tax hikes with the increasing debt the country is facing and made the claim that without these new taxes, Kenyan society will be doomed in the future. What then further accelerated the protest was the Ruto administration's reluctance to cut down on their own expenditures. For instance, the president's wife was allocated an annual budget of 5 million euros, with no explicit allocation purposes stated.

Going to the streets is nothing rare within the Kenyan context, and the most recent protests can be seen as part of a broader movement against tax hikes and economic policies in Kenya. In 2023, similar protests erupted against the US-IMF-backed tax regime, which were also met with violent suppression by the police and President Ruto's administration. Despite sharing similarities with these protests, this new wave of protests is different as they are mass-based and youth-led. Through the inclusion of different ethnicities, the protests have been unprecedented in scale and have led to significant disruptions of political structures, namely the resignation of the cabinet and the rejection of the proposed finance bill. Still, as Kenya faces increasing debt and the finance bill has been rejected, the question remains on how to repay the debt while preventing a debt vortex. This shifts attention away from the corrupt government of Kenya towards larger patterns of inequality and dependency that exist between the global north and south.

The increasing influence of international financial institutions, particularly the IMF and World Bank, has been a contentious issue in Kenya, with many viewing these policies as a continuation of economic dependency that hinders true independence. Scholars have drawn parallels between the contemporary struggle against these economic impositions and Kenya's historical fight for independence, arguing that the imposition of austerity measures and structural adjustments by Western institutions echoes the colonial economic exploitation that Kenya sought to escape.

Dissatisfaction with current regimes and the struggle for independence that ousted in these current protest waves is something echoed in a variety of different African countries. As we see protests unfold in other African countries such as Uganda and Nigeria, an important question needs to be asked: ***Are we experiencing the onset of an African Spring?***

Similar to the Arabic Spring, the recent waves have been led by the growing dissatisfaction among Africa's youth, who are increasingly vocal about their economic grievances. This has led some people to argue that there are striking parallels between the Arab Spring and Africa, suggesting that Africa might be on the edge of a broader wave of uprising. While there are some similarities, such as widespread economic dissatisfaction, mobilisation via social media, corruption, and youth-led mass protests, the situation across Africa is not uniform. Although protests within Kenya could potentially inspire other African nations to engage in similar actions, as of this moment, it is premature to speak about an "African Spring." The future and stability

within the African region will depend on how these governments respond to these protests, the ability of protesters to sustain their movements, and the extent to which these movements will inspire change in other parts of Africa.

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