

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GEN Z DEMONSTRATIONS

“Insights from Kenya and Tanzania”

Introduction

Recently, Comrade Amos Makalla, Secretary of the Central Committee of Ideology, Publicity, and Training of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), commented on the Generation Z (*Gen Z, typically is defined as individuals born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, is known for its familiarity with digital technology, the internet, and social media*) demonstrations in Kenya. This provides a valuable opportunity to explore the differing responses between Kenya and Tanzania. By examining cultural, social, political, and economic factors, this article aims to shed light on the distinctions of civic engagement and governmental accountability in these neighboring countries.

1.0 Cultural and Social Factors

1.1 Kenya's societal background is marked by a rich textile of ethnic diversity, nurturing a vibrant and often vocal civil society. This diversity, coupled with high literacy rates and a robust media environment, fuels active public discourse and a culture of self-reliance among the younger generation. Unlike Tanzania, where extended family structures and collective societal norms prevail, Kenyan society encourages individual activism and independence. This cultural backdrop contributes to a heightened sensitivity to government policies and a readiness to mobilize against perceived injustices.

1.2 Tanzania, in contrast, has a more harmonious ethnic environment, shaped by Julius Nyerere's post-independence vision of national unity. While this has promoted social cohesion, it has also led to a less confrontational public sphere. Tanzanian society places a strong emphasis on extended family networks, which can sometimes limit individual self-reliance and activism among the youth. The media countryside in Tanzania is more controlled, which can suppress public difference and limit the scope for civic engagement.

2.0 Political Factors

- 2.1 Kenya operates within a competitive multiparty democracy framework, which encourages political participation and activism. The relative independence of the judiciary provides a legal avenue for challenging governmental actions, as evidenced by the recent Finance Bill 2024 protests. The freedom of expression and association in Kenya further supports the populace's ability to organize and voice dissent effectively.
- 2.2 Tanzania's political environment has been shaped by its history as a single-party state, with CCM maintaining a dominant position. This has led to a less competitive political sphere and a restricted space for political dissent. The executive branch wields considerable power, and the judiciary's independence is limited compared to Kenya. This environment results in fewer opportunities for public protest and a more subdued approach to challenging government policies.

3.0 Economic Factors

- 3.1 The Kenyan economy is characterized by a liberalized market system and a vibrant private sector that fosters economic independence and entrepreneurship. However, significant economic inequality exists, which can fuel public discontent and demands for greater governmental accountability. The recent protests against the Finance Bill 2024 highlight how economic grievances can catalyze widespread public action.
- 3.2 Historically, Tanzania has had a state-controlled economy with less emphasis on private sector development. While this has contributed to relative economic stability, it also means that economic grievances may not surface as readily in public protests. The slower pace of economic liberalization has mitigated some of the immediate economic pressures that often drive public demonstrations.

4.0 Implications for Demanding Rights

4.1 The interaction of a dynamic civil society, a culture of self-reliance, a competitive political landscape, and relatively open media channels enables Kenyans to mobilize effectively and demand their rights. The response to the Finance Bill 2024 exemplifies the population's capacity to challenge government policies through organized activism, legal recourse, and public discourse.

4.2 The more controlled political and media environment in Tanzania, coupled with a less independent judiciary, restricts the avenues for challenging government policies. Consequently, Tanzanians face greater barriers to public dissent and political activism, resulting in a less confrontational approach to government policies.

Conclusion

The distinct cultural, social, political, and economic landscapes of Kenya and Tanzania shape the ways in which citizens engage with their governments and demand their rights. Kenya's open and dynamic environment fosters a culture of activism and public engagement, whereas Tanzania's more controlled environment presents significant barriers to civic activism. Understanding these differences is crucial for appreciating the varying levels of public engagement and government accountability in these two countries.

The author (Respicius E. Mwijage)

Tax lawyer with experience in Tax Dispute Resolution

E-mail: remwijage@yahoo.com

Mob: +255 688 526 718