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INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

No Longer on the Sidelines?

YOUTH AND POLITICS

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

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Dear Readers,

If you have been following public debate on youth and politics in Germany over the last few years, you may have gained the impression of a generation of young people who are increasingly committed to standing up for their interests while, at the same time, feeling that their concerns are not being adequately heard. Number one among these concerns: climate change. Since 2019, climate strikes and the Fridays for Future movement have strongly defined the image of "youth" in Germany. But does this impression stand up to scrutiny? The September 2021 federal elections certainly caused a few cracks to appear in this image, with as many first-time voters opting for the Liberals as for the Greens, their supposedly "natural" favourite.

If we cannot assume that a generation of young people in Germany share the same interests, then the picture becomes even more disparate when we look beyond Germany and Europe. In some cases, there are major differences between young people's aspirations and priorities, their social circumstances, and opportunities for political participation. In the West, young people are free to protest and voice their concerns, whereas in other countries this could mean losing their freedom or even their lives. While young people in wealthier nations may be preoccupied with important and fundamental questions about the future because their own present material needs have generally been met, the lives of their peers in other parts of the world tend to be dominated by worries about their personal financial situation and that of their families. In Germany, there is talk of lowering the voting age to 16, partly because of the numerical superiority of older voters. Meanwhile, young people in Sub–Saharan Africa make up the majority of the population.

And yet we can still observe similarities across borders. On the one hand, young people are interested in politics and keen to be involved, while being disenchanted with traditional institutions such as political parties on the other. Elisabeth Hoffmann, Florian Karner, Katharina Hopp, Alina Reiß, Sebastian Grundberger, Thomas Schaumberg, and Laura Rubio highlight this common characteristic among young people when looking at West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. They illustrate the fact that many young people are worried about issues such as corruption, lack of job opportunities, and – especially during the pandemic – the health of their families. Although many acknowledge that climate change is a challenge that has to be resolved multilaterally, the authors note that "climate strikes and similar protests are at best a marginal phenomenon limited to better-off areas".

About one quarter of young people worldwide are affected by violent conflict. In her article, Andrea Ellen Ostheimer traces how the United Nations discourse on the role of youth in conflict has changed over the years, with increased focus being placed on young people's positive contribution to conflict prevention and mediation.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominates the everyday lives of young people in the Palestinian territories. Steven Höfner and Alena Jabarine describe the situation of a

generation subjected to the dual burden of Israeli occupation and the rigid authoritarianism of Fatah and Hamas and which is trying to find a common voice – particularly by digital means.

According to Benno Müchler and Anna Reismann, young people in Sub-Saharan Africa are "both feared and courted". The sheer number of young people – among them many potential voters – ensures that youth are regularly wooed, at least in the run-up to elections. In practice, however, the youth policy of many states and the African Union tends to be far removed from the everyday lives of young people. Looking specifically at Nigeria, Vladimir Kreck investigates how legal, cultural, and economic barriers prevent young people's political participation in the most populous country on the continent.

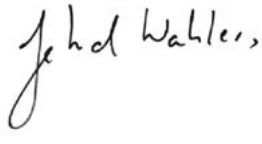
Kevin Oswald and Luiz Gustavo Carlos focus on educational and career opportunities for young people. In Brazil, structural inequality is leading to the emergence of a "neither-nor generation". Far too many young people can neither access education nor a job – a situation that previous left-wing governments, as well as today's Bolsonaro government, have failed to permanently resolve.

And finally, we turn our gaze towards Europe. In spring 2021, students Hugo Leclerc and Jannis Stöter founded La DenkFabrik, a think tank designed to spark interest in the Franco-German partnership among young people on both sides of the Rhine. The pair talked to International Reports about their project, the state of the Franco-German partnership, and how young people on the old continent can be more involved in the European integration process.

Young people from all over the world want to create change. Yet there are no consistent answers to the question of what really matters to them and the obstacles they encounter. This is highlighted by the articles in this issue of International Reports. What is more, the contrast between young and old often invoked in the German debate seems misleading when applied to many of the issues concerning young people around the globe. Peace, democratic participation, an economy based on merit and equal opportunity rather than corruption – here the goals of young people are likely to coincide with the wishes of many others in their societies.

I hope you will find this report a stimulating read.

Yours,



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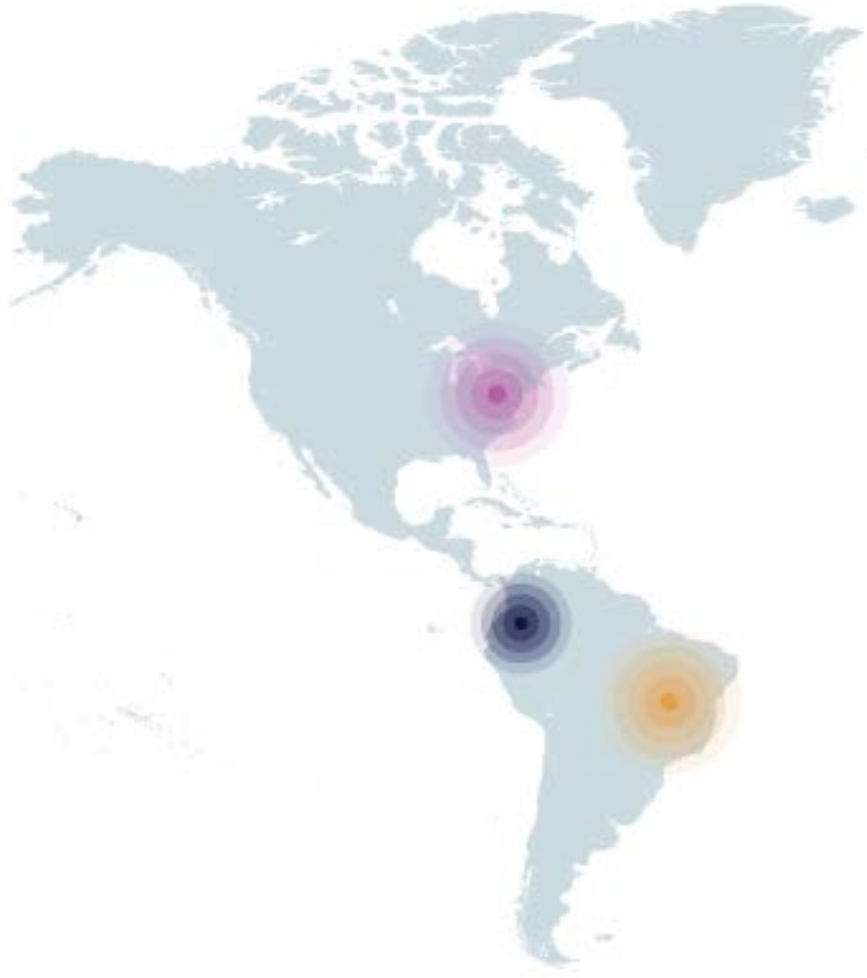
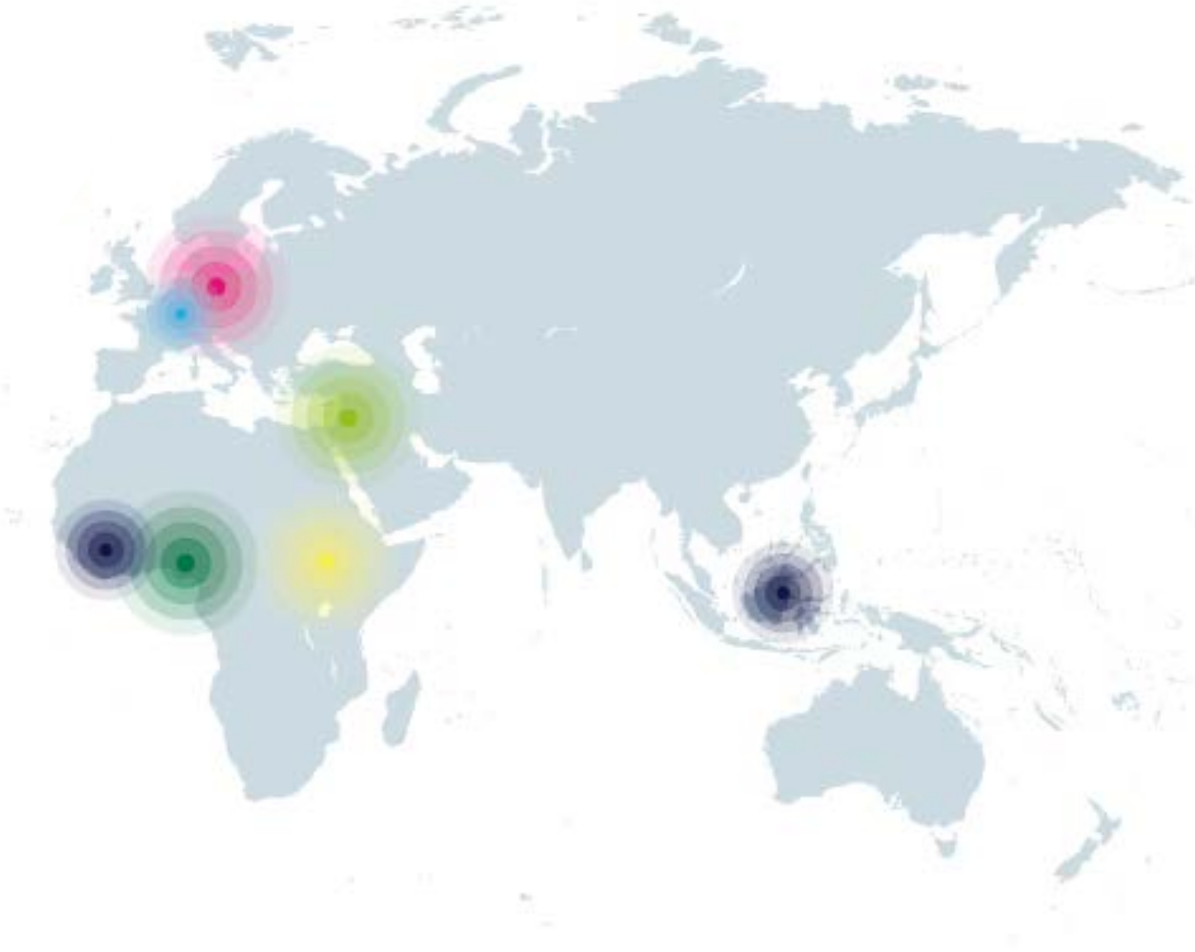
No Longer on the Sidelines? Youth and Politics





Source: © Adriana Loureiro, Reuters.

Between Hope and Resignation

Young People and Politics in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America

Elisabeth Hoffmann / Florian Karner / Katharina Hopp / Alina Reiß / Sebastian Grundberger / Thomas Schaumberg / Laura Rubio

All around the globe – in countries with and without democratically elected governments – young people are taking to the streets to protest about issues concerning them and demanding change. Depending on the region, different experiences shape their view of politics and society. But what are the specific concerns of young people? We turn our focus towards West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

"Once again, the youth of today are forcefully stating their demands with regard to shaping the future of our society and demands the settings for the course needed for this be initiated today. Environmental protection and climate change, in particular, have grown considerably in importance as issues of relevance to the future." These comments come from a summary of the 2019 Shell Youth Study and therefore refer to Germany. According to the study, for young people in Germany, environmental protection and climate change "are at the centre of the demand for greater participation and a call to action on the part of the political classes and society." Overall, today's young generation is characterised by a "pragmatic outlook". They are performance-oriented and generally satisfied with democracy.[1] However, this fundamental satisfaction with democracy lies in stark contrast to their disenchantment with the political parties that play such a key role within it. According to a survey conducted by the Generationen Stiftung in 2021, 54 per cent of young respondents do not feel represented by any of the parties running for office at the Bundestag elections. And more than 83 per cent said the government ignores their concerns despite various protests over recent years.[2]

But what is the situation in other parts of the world? What are young people's concerns, what are their goals? How do they rate their future prospects? And in what ways do political and socio-economic circumstances, which can differ greatly from region to region and country to country, shape young people's attitudes and ambitions?

This article focuses on three regions where the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) runs regional programmes that focus on political dialogue and, not least, promoting the next generation of politicians: West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. It is based, inter alia, on non-representative surveys conducted by these programmes among young people in the regions concerned. The picture that emerges is a complex one. While many young people have a clear desire for political engagement, the political realities often lead to resignation – or protest. Their trust in parties and political institutions has been shaken in many cases. In Southeast Asia, for example, a majority of survey participants said they were unhappy with their system of government. In West Africa, where even proximity to traditional politicians is viewed as detrimental to one's reputation, many young people migrate within the region or abroad, with the well-educated being the least likely to vote. This is in stark contrast to countries like Germany, where 87 per cent of highly educated young people voted in the 2017 federal elections compared to just 64 per cent of those with lower levels of education.[3]

And yet young people in the regions concerned are also drivers of change, despite their circumstances often being much more difficult than in Germany. They may not be particularly interested in political parties, but they are interested in politics. Young people are taking to the streets in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Depending on the particular country, they protest against corruption, one-party systems, military coups, negligent COVID-19 policies, poverty, hunger, and drug trafficking. The protests are certainly having an impact and at times instigating far-reaching changes. In Chile, for example,

they have led to the drafting of a new constitutional process. However, climate change is of minor importance for young people in the three regions of comparison – at least in the national context. Here, political and economic stability are the dominant issues. They believe climate change has been caused by the Western industrialised nations.

COVID-19 is a very important issue for young people, and is causing them great concern. Many young people in the three regions are worried about poverty and hunger, the death of family members, and rising unemployment. We will now look in more detail at the findings for the three selected regions.

"Young African" – a Pleonasm

While in Germany, a young person is defined as being between the ages of 14 and 17 inclusive or, depending on the definition, under the age of 27,[4] the definition is broader in Africa. The African Charter on Youth[5] defines youth as those persons aged between 15 and 35, and the age group under 35 years now accounts for around 77 per cent of Africa's total population. By 2050, the latter is expected to almost double to 2.4 billion.[6] Yet, definitions of youth in (West) Africa vary greatly depending on social contexts and actual circumstances. For example, it is not uncommon for members of party youth organisations to be 40 to 50, with unmarried 40-year-olds often still living with their parents. In a study carried out by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (detailed below), 60 per cent of participants associate the transition to adulthood with financial independence or regular, paid work. High rates of youth unemployment have led people to be reliant on their families for longer, and 49 per cent still live in the family home.

For this study[7] conducted by the KAS Regional Programme Political Dialogue West Africa, 2,000 young people aged between 18 and 35 from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Benin, and Togo were interviewed by the market research company LOOKA. It afforded a variety of insights into their ambitions and perspectives. Here, the results of the survey are rounded out and supplemented by qualitative interviews with African scholarship holders in both West Africa and Germany.

72 per cent of the young people interviewed are currently looking for a job.

Personal Priorities: Education, Jobs, and Material Security

Despite dissatisfaction with the education sector, perceived as being too inflexible and dominated by curricula that are often inadequately oriented towards skills actually needed in the labour market, the level of education in the region has gradually improved over the years. For example, the proportion of young Ivorians in upper secondary education has increased from 25 per cent in 2014 to 34 per cent in 2019, and the proportion of those in tertiary education has risen from 8.2 per cent in 2013 to 10 per cent in 2019.[8] These increasingly educated young people are becoming more ambitious and improving their personal economic situation has become a priority. However, national and regional economic policy still lacks suitable approaches to promote private investment and effectively back it up with the necessary conditions for increasing the level of industrialisation and absorbing the large number of school-leavers into the labour market. According to the KAS survey, 72 per cent of the young people interviewed are currently looking for a job, and just under one-third can imagine leaving Africa behind. The higher their level of education, the greater their willingness to leave their own country for economic reasons. This trend is somewhat more pronounced in West and Central Africa than in the eastern and southern parts of the continent.[9] This potential talent drain could have a major economic impact over the medium- and long-term. The trend is intensified by the fact that young people feel a responsibility towards their families, with

And what comes after graduation? The educational level of young people in West Africa has recently increased noticeably. Nevertheless, the prospects on the labour market remain uncertain for many. Source: © Afolabi Sotunde, Reuters.

six out of ten respondents stating that they support their (extended) family financially.

The attractiveness of international organisations as employers, especially for well-educated specialists and university graduates, is correspondingly high. The trend is still towards public sector jobs rather than the private sector, which is associated with lower levels of job security. Those who do choose the path of entrepreneurship are predominantly young men setting up a business in the agricultural and tourism sectors. However, the proportion of registered small and medium-sized enterprises is low across all economic sectors, and the middle class remains largely undeveloped. A clear majority of respondents feel that governments and political classes tend to ignore their needs and concerns. Having said that, most of them are optimistic about the future, and 85 per cent believe life in their country will improve in the next ten years. A 2013 survey by the Pew Research Center produced a similar result, determining that half of Africans surveyed were optimistic about the future and believed the next generation would be in a better position.[10] This may come as a surprise, but the continent has become an increasingly important market and African economies have been booming for years. For example, real GDP growth for West Africa before the COVID-19 pandemic stood at 3.3 per cent (2018), with countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Benin in the lead recording real GDP growth of 7.4 per cent and six per cent respectively.[11] Even though we cannot fully anticipate the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic growth seems to be stabilising. For 2021 and 2022, the World Bank is forecasting 2.1 per cent for West Africa and 3 per cent for Central Africa.[12] Although high population growth is

resulting in an increased number of people living in extreme poverty, Africa's poverty rate has fallen steadily over the last few decades.[13]

Elections Significant, but Little Trust in Politicians

A clear majority of young people obtain their information about domestic politics from television (34 per cent), followed by Facebook (20 per cent), and radio (19 per cent). There are relatively high levels of trust in political information that comes from family members – on average, 31 per cent of young people trust information conveyed in this way. This figure is as high as 37 per cent among the lower educated, while only 18 per cent of university graduates primarily rely on family members for political information. Social media channels take second place as trusted sources of information at 21 per cent, with Facebook (20 per cent) well ahead of WhatsApp (8 per cent) as the top platform in West Africa. Only 4 per cent regularly obtain information from online or analogue newspapers.

The importance of elections continues to be high for the younger generation. 77 per cent say they have already voted in national elections, 67 per cent intend to do so, and 26 per cent are undecided. 5 per cent say they will not vote. The survey corroborates the findings of a recent Afrobarometer study on youth in Côte d'Ivoire: the higher their level of education, the less likely they are to vote. 60 per cent of less educated respondents voted in the last election, whereas the figure for the more highly educated was merely 41 per cent.[14] The reasons for this are certainly complex and cannot be discussed in detail here. It would, however, be reasonable to assume that better-educated young people are more likely to question structural conditions and, given the lack of adherence to democratic principles, tend to have less trust in politicians. Interestingly, a quarter of all respondents (26 per cent) felt the voting age of 18 was too low.

Young people generally prefer to discuss politics with friends rather than family. At local and municipal level, they primarily turn to their *chef du quartier*, a kind of neighbourhood head or spokesperson, to tackle and find solutions to their problems. They consider elected mayors and members of parliament to have little use in this respect. While around half of respondents know the name of a parliamentarian, 89 per cent say they do not know how to contact an MP. A large majority would be in favour of involving traditional or religious authorities in political decisions – despite this being illegal in some countries. This leads to the conclusion that such authorities have a better understanding of young people's lives and enjoy a higher level of trust than elected politicians. It seems that the executive has not yet become aware of this deficit of trust. For example, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara recently appointed 14 new district governors: 13 men and one woman, not one of them below 50. The caption beneath a photo of the new ministers stated that the president wanted a modern and decentralised Côte d'Ivoire to speed up the development of regions far from the economic hub of Abidjan for the Ivorian population.

32 per cent of respondents say they never talk about politics.

The fact that 32 per cent of young respondents say they never talk about politics is sobering but hardly surprising. At 40 per cent, this tendency is particularly pronounced among young women. There is widespread dissatisfaction among youth party members, but it is rarely expressed in public. This is because the parties lack processes for a constructive, transparent dialogue that take young people's interests seriously. That youth associations are often led by people in their forties and fifties also illustrates this. Young people involved in civil society organisations often say they are apolitical in order to avoid any proximity to traditional politicians. However, there is no lack of interest in shaping the future of their countries; half of all respondents – all of them living in capital cities

and economic centres – said they were involved in civil society.

Bad Governance and Fear of Food Insecurity

An analysis of those respondents interested in politics predominantly reveals similarities in terms of socio-political challenges. Besides concerns about unemployment and the difficulty of finding steady employment, bad governance is a recurring theme. Trust in state institutions and administration is low, especially in the education sector. Criticism is levelled against the military's interference in national politics, and corruption is perceived as systemic and a major obstacle to development.

The threat to food security emerges as a key challenge for West Africa as a whole.

Many of the respondents also mentioned the threat to food security as a key challenge for the respective countries and for West Africa as a whole. Concerns in this regard are fuelled by the continent's strong dependence on trade in goods and the fact that, despite the abundance of resources in a region where large swathes of the population are smallholder farmers, countries are far from being self-sufficient. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation due to partial border closures for people and goods. The young respondents made no mention of the final, concrete implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) or even projects such as the common African passport as solutions for creating greater mobility and food security through economic growth. This may be due to the abstract nature of these political projects, but perhaps also to a lack of confidence in the African Union (AU) and its 54 member states, which are responsible for implementing and actually applying the free trade agreement. In terms of foreign policy, young West Africans attribute great importance only to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations when it comes to regional or international organisations. However, ECOWAS is increasingly struggling with its reputation as an exclusive club for West African heads of state that fails to build an integrative structure for the benefit of West African societies.

The issue of food security represents a thematic bridge to climate change. Viewed in isolation, young West Africans do not perceive climate change to be a major concern. However, issues like water shortages, droughts, and deforestation are certainly viewed as related to climate change. People who work in agriculture are ever more aware of changes to dry and rainy seasons and how lakes are drying up. For example, in 2021, Côte d'Ivoire – a country that, by regional standards, has a well-developed infrastructure – suffered major power cuts and energy supply problems because the water level of several dams was too low for energy generation. Research into the individual causes leads people to a clear conclusion – climate change is seen as a consequence of Western industrialised nations' economic development. Those nations have caused the problem, so now they are expected to find and finance the solutions.

Growing Awareness of the Issue of Security

The issue of security is increasingly becoming one of interest and concern for young people in (West) Africa. The understanding of the term is distinct and encompasses the complexity of security as a concept in its military and social facets. Specifically, respondents mention the often-inadequate security surrounding elections, the proliferation of weapons and drugs, xenophobic attacks, and ethno-religious conflicts. Some of them blame it on tribalism or poverty. Another current reason is the spread of Islamist terrorism in the Sahel region, with a number of groups increasingly targeting the coastal countries on the Gulf of Guinea. There have been a growing number of attacks such as on military

posts in northern Côte d'Ivoire. The US, France, and China, among others, are named as key foreign policy partners, while Russia and regional partners such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Niger are seen as important actors in the area of security policy.

Young People in Southeast Asia – Disenchantment with Political Parties but Not with Politics

Courage and motivation – this attitude characterises the youth of Southeast Asia as they

Risky protest: When young people in Myanmar take to the streets against the military coup or (as pictured) in Thailand against irresponsible COVID-19 policies, they have to fear for their safety or even for their lives.
Source: © Cory Wright, Reuters.

try to shape their future. Both are urgently needed when young demonstrators fearlessly and indefatigably protest against the military coup in Myanmar, or against the government's inadequate COVID-19 policy in neighbouring Thailand. Yet, based on extensive contact with young people of the KAS Political Dialogue Programme Asia, it is clear that this is a prevalent attitude across other countries in the region, too. These observations are confirmed, inter alia, by the results of a non-representative survey conducted by the Regional Programme. It involved more than 350 young people aged 18 to 35, mostly with higher levels of education[15], in Southeast Asia[16].

Climate Change and Corruption Are a Cause for Concern

Courage and motivation are needed to protest political injustice nationally and to tackle pressing concerns about the future of the world, such as climate change. Here, the survey shows commonalities as well as differences between Germany and Southeast Asia. Even though only a fraction of all young people actively participated in the Fridays for Future protests in Germany, the latest Shell Youth Study[17] reveals that climate change and pollution are seen as the main challenges. This applies across all social strata in Germany, although economic hardship is still a major problem for those on lower incomes.[18]

The respondents to the KAS survey share similar concerns: 65 per cent view climate change as the most serious global challenge. This is followed by COVID-19 (59 per cent), inequality, and poverty (around 30 per cent each). The question of the three most serious national challenges leads to a shift in this emphasis. Only 15 per cent of respondents mention climate change and pollution among the three most urgent issues for their country. This is because climate change tends to be viewed as a multilateral problem. Instead, corruption is seen as the biggest national challenge (50 per cent). This result is in line with the findings of other studies.[19] In Southeast Asia, the term corruption may incorporate various

aspects of unlawfully exercising public power for private gain, including government officials exceeding their authority or failing to perform their proper duties, poor management of public funds, and monetary incentives to vote for a particular party in elections. Clientelism and patronage are still firmly anchored in Southeast Asia's social structures. After corruption, COVID-19 (45 per cent) comes a close second in the respondents' perception of domestic challenges. More than half say their economic (55 per cent) and personal (61 per cent) situations have worsened since the outbreak of the pandemic. Around 20 per cent believe lack of democratisation and related indicators such as freedom of expression, human rights, and the rule of law poses challenges to their society.

Young people in Southeast Asia have mixed feelings about their own future and that of their country. Their life goals mainly involve building a career and starting a family, along with happiness, health, and the feeling of "helping to create positive change" (all between 35 per cent and 40 per cent). It is worth noting that they tend to rate their own prospects as good, while adopting a generally pessimistic view of their country's future on the whole. In contrast, over 50 per cent of young people in Germany are optimistic about their country's future.[20] The bleak country prospects may be caused by the dissatisfaction of respondents in Southeast Asia with their government and political system. Fewer than 15 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied. This is linked to the desire of the majority (over 90 per cent) for greater youth participation in politics. This dissatisfaction includes the politicians, who are seen to ignore the opinions and concerns of young people (over 60 per cent). Many Southeast Asian countries have hierarchical societies where age and experience are highly valued. Some countries have formal political structures for youth engagement at national and local levels, but these are all too often democratically illegitimate, are run by senior party politicians, or are instrumentalised as training grounds for the children of influential politicians. Therefore, there are opportunities for young people to get involved in (party) politics, but they are often not open to all or have a limiting effect. For example, this may be the case when opportunities for youth participation are not linked to implementation capacities or when young people are prevented from participating in other forums due to the existence of youth councils. In Germany, by comparison, young people are more satisfied with their politicians and generally less negative about the political processes.[21]

The desire for change is reflected in strong civil society engagement.

Civic Rather than Political Party Engagement

The respondents to the KAS survey are mostly politically interested. Hence, it is not surprising that 15 per cent of respondents – a high number in comparison to the total population – are members of a political party. However, most respondents (85 per cent) are not member of a political party and their reasons are disillusioning: 37 per cent say that they do not feel represented by any of the existing political parties, which correlates with their dissatisfaction with the political system and politicians. Some respondents also criticise the political climate and the integrity of parties and their members. There is a clear desire for change, but there seems to be limited scope for achieving this in national politics. The party systems of many Southeast Asian countries render it difficult for young people to really engage in party politics, particularly for those without an influential family background or a good economic standing. In some countries, working in opposition to the government can be risky and have negative consequences. Overall, clientelism is often part of appointing political positions and in many cases parties serve as an instrument of the political (and economic) elites to mobilise voters and gain access to state resources. Additionally, it is difficult for young people to identify with a party due to the lack of clear programmes and the fluidity of party systems.

Dissatisfaction with the political system and disenchantment with political parties lies in stark contrast to the keen interest in politics and strong engagement in civil society by the youth. The KAS survey reveals that young people in Southeast Asia are unhappy with their country's political system, but this does not translate into discontent with politics as a whole. Instead, they are somewhat or very interested in political events (86 per cent) and like to keep up to date with the news. According to a 2014 UN survey involving more than 17,800 young people from South and Southeast Asia, 65 per cent of respondents in the Philippines, 60 per cent in Indonesia, 67 per cent in Thailand, 52 per cent in Malaysia, and 75 per cent in Vietnam follow political news.[23] The desire for change is reflected in strong civil society engagement. 72 per cent of respondents to the Regional Programme's survey are involved in non-governmental, university, or community organisations. This high figure may be related to the respondents' high levels of education, since social and political engagement correlates with the education level. According to the UN survey, 58 per cent of Indonesian youth with tertiary education are politically and civically engaged (for example, through petitions and protests), compared to just 44 per cent with lower education levels.[24] In addition to shortcomings inherent in political parties the aforementioned organisations may be appealing because results can be seen more quickly in comparison to political decision making with voting, negotiating, and having to make compromises. Hence, "creating positive change" is achieved sooner. Social media plays an important role here, too.

The US enjoys a much better reputation than China.

A quarter of all respondents to the KAS Regional Programme survey are also actively involved in protests. An example of this is the democracy movement in Thailand, where students call for the removal of the Prime Minister, a new constitution, and a redefinition of the role of the monarchy. They have been subjected to violence and arrest as a result.[25] In Myanmar, young people are also risking their lives in the struggle against the military coup of February 2021, as mentioned earlier.[26] Strong political interest combined with dissatisfaction and disenchantment with political parties, while also being socially and politically engaged in other forums and online – these trends could be observed in Southeast Asia a decade ago[27] and have persisted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pillars of democracy – free elections and a functional opposition – received widespread approval in the KAS survey. Remarkable are the answers on whether a rigid leader is needed to effectively run the country. 39 per cent agree or strongly agree with this statement, while 31 per cent disagree or strongly disagree. 30 per cent are undecided on this issue. However, a rigid leader is not only associated with negative attributes, such as limiting freedom, but can also be seen as a leader who guarantees order and progress. Young people's understanding of democracy in Southeast Asia is closely tied to good governance – effective and transparent government actions.[28]

Preference for Regional Solutions

How important are multilateral solutions for young people and who are the main players in the region's security architecture? Around 35 per cent of respondents mentioned the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) when asked who should be their country's main partner on multilateral issues. Although ASEAN has not yet been successful in building a determined and united opposition to China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, it still enjoys deep appreciation among the region's youth. This is certainly linked to the realisation that the giant to the north can only be countered through closer regional cooperation. Interestingly, China and the US – the systemic rivals striving for hegemony in the region – are seen as equally important for the foreign policy of the respondents' respective countries (each with

around ten per cent). However, the US enjoys a much better reputation than China. Against this backdrop, the EU also increasingly positions itself as a key partner for the region. Still, more needs to be done to capitalise on this momentum. ASEAN, China, and the US have stronger economic, security, and political ties in the region. On the other hand, the EU and its Member States are (still) struggling to increase their engagement in the region.[29]

In 2019, young people in Latin America were spending almost twice as long on social media as North Americans.

The focus of young people in Southeast Asia is on the social and political challenges in their own countries. The region's youth are articulating their dissatisfaction and are calling for change. They are drivers of political and social transformation by increasingly demanding a greater say in society and questioning hierarchical structures.

Material Needs Predominate among Latin America's Youth

Faced with digital transformation and new protest movements on the one hand, and traditional problems such as corruption and social dislocation on the other, Latin America's youth are at the heart of social and political upheaval in the region. Young people's lives have been turned upside down by strict lockdowns and they have been impacted by the pandemic at a particularly formative stage in life. The latest UN survey of young people aged 15 to 29 in Latin America and the Caribbean[30] reveals that 52 per cent of respondents have experienced stress and anxiety in connection with the pandemic. For Latin American youth, who were already comparatively heavy internet users, the pandemic intensified the shift of many activities to the virtual space. In 2019, young people in Latin America were, on average, spending nearly three and a half hours a day on social media – almost twice as long as their North American counterparts.[31]

A young Brazilian woman mourns her mother who died of COVID-19: The pandemic has hit the region particularly hard and so the concern for the health and material well-being of their own family is currently at the forefront for young people in Latin America. Source: © Bruno Kelly, Reuters.

According to the above-mentioned UN survey, 93 per cent of young respondents consider themselves to be well-informed about the pandemic. Opinions about how their own governments have responded to the pandemic are more differentiated, however. While 30 per cent describe the response as "bad" or "very bad", a similar percentage (32 per cent) consider it to be "regular" and 38 per cent evaluate it as "good" or "very good". Only 21 per cent said that their own family had received support from a government programme during the pandemic. 16 per cent of respondents said they had either lost their jobs or had employment restricted as a result of the pandemic (such as through reduced working hours or loss of earnings). In light of this, it is hardly surprising that the list of personal concerns about the future is dominated by worries about the family's financial situation with 64 per cent, followed by fear of losing a family member

and a delay in their studies (50 per cent respectively). In turn, "political conflicts" are given much less priority at 32 per cent.

Crisis of Confidence in Democratic Institutions and Parties

Having said this, young people have been and remain the protagonists of numerous social and political struggles. This is especially true for the social unrest that hit Latin America prior to and during the pandemic. The most prominent example of this is Chile, where a predominantly youth-driven protest movement led to the drafting of a new constitution. Renowned Chilean sociologist and author Carlos Peña points out that, besides substantive demands, the "generational" factor should not be overlooked in the protests. This is because as the influence of traditional sources of authority such as churches, trade unions, and political parties begins to wane, young people's activism is more strongly shaped by their subjective experiences, consumption, and an ever-growing range of influences.[32] This is not only the case in Chile. Over the past months and years, it has also applied to other – otherwise very different – arenas of social mobilisation and political protest, including in Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Colombia, Cuba, and Peru. The common thread in all these developments is that calls for mobilisation have primarily taken place via electronic media and been supported by fairly loose, largely non-institutionalised alliances. These protests, mainly led by young people, are often directed against the perceived inability of an ossified political system to adequately respond to their demands for greater participation, more rights of all kinds, including for diverse social groups, more prosperity, and greater educational justice. In this context, political parties were often perceived as part of the political system that they are fighting against.[33]

In contrast to this activism, various studies and surveys show that youth participation in formal democratic bodies such as political parties, and in elections, was already on the wane before the COVID-19 pandemic. Lowering the voting age to 16 in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador has done nothing to change this. It is interesting to note that in many Latin American countries, the right to stand for election to various offices such as municipal councillors, members of parliament, or the presidency is only granted from the age of 21, 25, 30 or even 35 (in the case of the office of senator or president in Brazil and Chile).[34]

Early indications suggest that the coronavirus pandemic has actually led young people to further distance themselves from formal political bodies

In fact, early indications suggest that the pandemic has actually led Latin American youth to further distance themselves from traditional political bodies.[35] The fact that many young people's trust in their political elites has continued to decline is also a common thread running through a non-representative survey conducted by the Regional Programme Party Dialogue and Democracy in Latin America. This survey involved more than 350 young people aged 18 to 35 with links to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and with high levels of political engagement. In this group, 31.7 per cent of participants said they were dissatisfied with their political elite, while 33.7 per cent were pessimistic about their country's future. However, another finding is even more telling. When asked if their peers were interested in politics, only 36 per cent answered in the affirmative.

Main Concerns: Corruption, Poverty, and Educational Justice

For both old and young alike, but especially the young, one of the region's age-old problems remains its greatest challenge – corruption. In this respect, the region has long performed poorly in international rankings. In recent years, a series of spectacular corruption scandals,

such as revelations surrounding the Lava Jato trial, have brought the issue into the focus of public debate and further shaken the population's already low levels of trust in their political establishment. Unsurprisingly, 57.3 per cent of participants in the KAS survey named corruption as the main problem in their country – followed by poverty, which was mentioned by 32.6 per cent of young respondents. The pandemic has significantly exacerbated social problems for young people. According to the above-mentioned representative UN survey, 31 per cent of young people have perceived food shortages in their community – a figure that rises to 44 per cent for respondents with a migrant background and 45 per cent for those from indigenous groups.

For young people, poverty and inequality are particularly striking in the education sector. In most Latin American countries, education is underfunded and characterised by a strong private school sector; which is largely accessible only to children from high-income families. Although more than two-thirds of all high school graduates attend public schools, they make up just one quarter of all students at state universities. Half of all children are still unable to read and write properly when they leave primary school. 90 per cent of these children are from families in the lowest income brackets.[36]

In this context, it comes as no surprise that educational justice is a key element underpinning political demands of young respondents in the KAS survey, the majority of whom are in academic education. In Latin America, access to top universities is much more restricted than in Europe. It is more closely linked to issues of social advancement than in the rich industrialised nations. In Europe, tertiary education tends to afford more opportunities for personal fulfilment and development, whereas the KAS survey suggests that Latin American youth are more focused on the material aspects, which are linked to secure, stable and well-paid employment. Overall, young people's optimism about their future increases in proportion to their level of educational attainment.

Another interesting aspect of the KAS survey is that despite most respondents considering climate change to be one of the most urgent global challenges (59.2 per cent), ahead of poverty (47.9 per cent), it lags far behind in their assessment of the main political challenges faced at home (just 10.4 per cent). Here, the top positions are occupied by corruption (57.4 per cent), education (41.6 per cent), unemployment (38.8 per cent), poverty (32.6 per cent), and drug trafficking (20.2 per cent). In Latin America, climate strikes and similar protests are at best a marginal phenomenon limited to better-off areas. It is clear that young people feel their lives are more impacted by problems affecting society as a whole – the lack of economic and political stability that afflicts their livelihoods – as opposed to more abstract issues such as climate change.

Young people tend to pay very little attention to China's role in Latin America.

The same applies to foreign policy issues. The European Union (37.8 per cent) and the US (19.8 per cent) are perceived as positive reference points for Latin American countries' foreign policy. The EU is seen as a model of best practice for domestic policymakers, while the US is mainly viewed as a destination with more opportunities. Most respondents believe that their country's foreign policy should entail cooperation with other states. However, at 30.4 per cent, a relatively large proportion of respondents say this foreign policy should primarily pursue national interests, also independent of multilateral organisations. As far as China is concerned, ignorance reigns. Measured against its future global significance, huge levels of Chinese investment, and the massive political pressure that Beijing exerts in large swathes of the region, young people tend to pay very little attention to the country.

Need for New Channels of Communication

Compared to previous generations, who often fought against authoritarian systems in their formative years, today's Latin American youth have largely grown up in democratic state structures, despite their deficits. While previous generations often regarded democracy as the goal of their political engagement, today's youth are primarily focused on these democratic systems' existing or perceived shortcomings. The danger is that protests against these shortcomings will transform into a growing distrust of democratic institutions and decision-making processes per se. In order to prevent this, institutions and parties are urgently required to establish new communication channels on the real-life concerns of young people and provide true opportunities for participation. Latin America's democracies will only be fit for the future if they take the demands of young people seriously, while also actively building systems of social consensus.

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The Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in the Context of the United Nations

Strengthening the Positive Role of Youth in Peace Processes

Andrea Ellen Ostheimer

Globally, there has been a rise in violent conflict and an increase in civilian casualties since 2010. The majority of conflicts involve low-income countries.[1] According to UN estimates, in 2020, 90 per cent of the world's 1.85 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 were living in developing countries.[2] Given the increase in armed conflict over the past decade, it is now estimated that more than 25 per cent of youth are exposed to violence and conflict.[3]

Although the impact of war and conflict on youth[4] has long been known, and youth organisations have made a significant contribution to prevention, mediation, and reconstruction in many conflict situations, the United Nations Security Council did not address the issue until 2015. Since then, however, the issue has garnered increasing attention with impressive momentum. Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020) have created a legally binding framework and formally placed the issue on the Security Council agenda. Despite the continued need to improve the implementation, progress has been made with an effort that extends beyond lip service, and ensures that youth can actively engage in formal peace processes and continue their constructive grassroots work unimpeded, thus gaining recognition and support as important actors in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Youth in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations

As early as 1996, the UN-mandated report on children in armed conflicts, presented by Graça Machel, Mozambique's former Minister of Education, focussed international attention on the situation of children and young people in conflict regions. The report focussed primarily on children and young people as victims of armed conflict.

Today, 25 years after that first report, and despite increased international attention and the development of legal norms, most of the challenges remain, or have been exacerbated by changing conflict structures. In the 1990s, a trend of targeting civilians surfaced and intensified with the rise of intra-state conflicts shaped by non-state conflict actors, whose goal is often the control of natural resources, as well as with attacks by terrorist organisations and transnationally operating organised crime networks.

According to estimates by the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, tens of thousands of child soldiers continue to be used by both national armed forces and armed groups in over 20 conflicts worldwide.[5] As documented in a recent report by Save the Children,[6] sexual violence is being perpetrated against civilians in 22 of the 54 active conflicts worldwide, with the number of attacks on children and young people increasing each year. Although women and girls are the primary targets of sexual violence, young men are also increasingly being strategically targeted and abused[7] – e.g., in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), South Sudan, and Syria. Armed conflict also impacts young people's access to and duration of educational opportunities,[8] their physical and mental health, and their nutrition. Conflicts also force children and youth to become displaced within their own countries, or even flee across national borders. UNHCR statistics show that 42 per cent of displaced persons registered in 2020 (82.4 million refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide) are children and adolescents under the age of 18.

Young people, however, are not just being forcibly recruited as child soldiers in armed conflicts. The rise of Islamist terrorist groups in recent years has also revealed the vulnerability of young people to violent extremism. It is important to emphasise that the majority of young people in regions at risk generally reject violent extremism. It has been documented, however, that it is primarily male youths who feel themselves attracted to extremism. Even if the underlying motivations are diverse, and often socio-economic in context, inadequate political responses frequently contribute to further marginalisation, and in some cases also stigmatisation, of this vulnerable segment of youth, so that extremist organisations find fertile terrain for recruitment.[9] Increasing radicalisation of youth by extremist groups and terrorist organisations was a key factor for UN Security Council members, particularly Jordan, to put the issue of Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) on the Council's agenda in 2015. This started with an open discussion at the Security Council in April 2015 on the role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace.[10]

UN Resolution S/RES/2250 (2015)[11] – the Foundation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

The first Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security (Amman)[12], organised by the Kingdom of Jordan in August 2015, put the issue firmly on the UN agenda, including on that of the Security Council. Jordan used its non-permanent seat on the Security Council to lay a foundation for the recognition of youth as important actors in preventing and resolving conflicts, and to call for their inclusion in peace processes through UN Resolution 2250 (2015). Specifically, the resolution called for greater participation of youth in peace processes through their integration, support for local youth peace initiatives, consultations with youth by Security Council members during visits to conflict regions, and strengthening the capacity of youth to engage in peace and conflict resolution mechanisms. In the resolution, the protection of youth in conflicts, as well as in the post-conflict context, was linked with a call to member states to protect civilians, especially youth, and their human rights within their territories, and to end impunity for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide.

Resolution 2250 places a much stronger focus on youth as actors within conflict than do subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020). For Jordan in 2015, the issue of youth in conflict was primarily related to the advance of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and counterterrorism. To prevent acts of violence, terrorist violence, and extremism, member states are encouraged to invest in both the quality of education for youth, so as to promote their participation in political processes and social structures, as well as to provide opportunities for their socioeconomic participation. The resolution also pays special attention to creating employment opportunities for youth in the context of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes to prevent further youth marginalisation via educational and employment opportunities.

For Jordan, the issue of youth in conflict was primarily related to counterterrorism.

Resolution 2250 already attempts to walk a tightrope in order to meet the interests of permanent members, such as Russia and China, in the fight against terrorism and extremism, while simultaneously gaining their approval for a more inclusive approach to peacekeeping. On the other hand, however, the stigmatisation of youth as potential perpetrators of violence (primarily young men) or indeed as victims ought to be countered, and their positive contributions to conflict prevention and peace work – as well as the significance that such engagement can have for the UN's peace architecture – should be emphasised.

The resolution's call for the Secretary General to submit a progress report to the Security Council,

and to include implementation steps in this report, ensured that the issue could not easily fall off the agenda again due to political interests of Security Council members.

Hindering youth participation in social and political processes increases their distrust of those in power.

Independent Progress Report "The missing peace" and UN Resolution S/RES/2419 (2018)

This independent progress report,[13] commissioned by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, could not be delivered until March 2018 due to its elaborate methodology; therefore, its recommendations were not debated in the Security Council until April 2018. The report was impressive, comprising a broad, global consultation process of more than 4,000 young people to ensure that not only elites, but also those who contribute at the grassroots level, are given a voice. The progress report sought to counter the narrative often cultivated by governments that youth are a problem to be addressed, when instead they need to be seen as partners in peacebuilding. The report's authors argued that three misperceptions in particular led to policymakers often overreacting and resorting to restrictive measures, thus directly contributing to youth alienation:

a) the demographic bulge of young people in a society leads to an increase in violence,
b) the high number of youth among refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons makes them a burden or risk for host communities, and
c) youth are per se susceptible to being targeted by terrorist organisations.

Moreover, the authors also see insufficient evidence that youth unemployment leads directly to violent conflict. Rather, they argue, it is horizontal inequalities,[14] lack of justice, and identity-based factors that must be considered as causes of conflict. For many young people, the report notes, educational opportunities are far more important than employment opportunities. The report also warns that hindering youth participation in social and political processes not only increases their distrust of those in power, but can also lead to complete youth disengagement from the formal processes of political decision-making and policy formation.

The report extensively documents the numerous and highly diverse peacebuilding activities of youth in different phases of conflict, and vis-à-vis different phenomena of violence (political conflict, violent extremism, organised crime violence, sexual and gender-based violence), thus strongly underlining the positive added value that youth involvement can have in the international security architecture. The authors call on both UN member states and Security Council members to invest more in building the skills and capacities of youth, as well as their networks and organisations, and to involve them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmes in the YPS context.

After Jordan in 2015, it was the two non-permanent Security Council members Peru and Sweden in 2018 that once again put the issue of Youth, Peace and Security on the Security Council agenda, and managed, despite shifting geopolitical constellations, to pass another legally binding resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter: S/RES/2419 (2018).[15] However, the negotiations on this were far more arduous than the unanimous adoption of the resolution would suggest. As with many other issues, such as climate and security, China and Russia expressed the view that Youth, Peace and Security was better placed in other UN bodies and did not necessarily belong on the Security Council agenda.[16] Russia also took issue with the approach of linking Youth, Peace and Security to the 2016 Sustaining Peace agenda S/RES/2282 (2016), although it is precisely this agenda that envisions a broader range of peace actors, and their integration into existing structures to build

peace and security. Russia, like the US under the Trump administration,[17] would have liked to see a stronger focus on countering violent extremism among youth. Security Council members, such as France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Peru, and the Netherlands, who were primarily concerned with the resolution's emphasis on the positive role of youth in conflict prevention and peace processes, and who wanted to codify greater support in this area, took issue with the classification of youth as agents of violence that this would entail. In terms of funding youth peace and security initiatives, Resolution 2419 was restrained, only asking member states to consider the needs and participation of youth in peace efforts.

Even with regard to the possibility of support from the Peacebuilding Commission, the resolution was curtailed and merely recommended that the Commission involve young people in discussions and consultations on peacebuilding at the national level. Far more so than the previous Resolution 2250, 2419 takes the United Nations itself to task for consulting youth, particularly in Security Council meetings, and involving them in decision-making processes. Representatives of the United Nations and its agencies, including Special Rapporteurs and Special Envoys, are urged to become much more aligned and coordinated than they have so far been on the needs of youth in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. It also requires the Secretary-General to provide information in his reports to the Security Council on progress in engaging youth in peace processes (including demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration programmes) and to submit an additional report on the implementation of Resolutions 2250 and 2419 by May 2020. Progressive Security Council members would have liked to see the latter establish an annual reporting requirement on YPS to firmly anchor the issue in the Security Council. However, a majority could not be achieved in support of this measure, or at least such was the case in 2018.

Although the commitment of member states to YPS does not yet match the commitment to Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 [2000]), and no national action plans have been called for thus far, Resolution 2419 at

The Jordanian crown prince at the opening of the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security in Amman 2015: For his country, in addition to the potential positive role of youth in resolving conflicts, the radicalisation of young people by extremists and terrorists was a reason to put the issue on the UN Security Council agenda.
Source: © Muhammad Hamed, Reuters.

least calls for regional and subregional organisations to establish both the policy framework and the necessary programmes to promote youth involvement. The African Union (AU) has set an example for rapid implementation[18] by managing to integrate the YPS agenda into the institutional processes of its peace and security architecture in the context of "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" and the "Silencing the Guns" initiative. The first AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting on YPS in November 2018 mandated the development of a continental framework for YPS, and launched the Youth for Peace Africa Programme by the end of 2018. In addition to an envoy for youth, the AU Commission appointed five regional youth peace ambassadors.[19] A study completed in 2020 also comprehensively documented youth contributions to peace and security in Africa.[20]

South Africa also used its seat on the UN Security Council[21] to put YPS back on the agenda

from an African perspective, and to adopt a presidential statement as Chair of the Security Council in December 2019.[22] Adoption of a presidential statement requires unanimity in the Security Council, yet controversies revealed the growing resistance in the Council, especially among the permanent members (P5), to moving the issue forward. Explicit references to climate change provoked objection from the United States, as well as from Russia and China. China and Russia were further bothered by demands to protect human rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly, and found support from among the elected members. Even the attempt in the Chairman's statement to revisit and reinforce the regular involvement of youth in Security Council consultative processes, as called for in Resolution 2419, was watered down with the phrase "where appropriate", and limited to restrictive thematic areas due to opposition in the Council.[23]

From Political Declarations of Intent to Concrete Steps of Implementation

Since 2015, non-permanent members of the Security Council in particular have ensured not only that the topic was discussed, but also that progress was made despite resistance. As an agenda item under "Preserving International Peace and Security", elected member Peru facilitated a discussion in July 2019 on progress made in the implementation of the YPS agenda. The UN's own actions were emphasised, in addition to positive initiatives of youth in conflict (Cameroon: training of 600 mediators for communal conflicts; Libya: minority youth dialogue on peace and stability). The UN Verification Mission in Colombia is considered exemplary as it developed a strategy for youth engagement, established a network of focal points in subordinate structures, and succeeded in engaging youth in nonviolent campaigning in the upcoming local elections through cross-party youth dialogues. The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq is also considered as a best practice for its work with youth on tribal conflicts and arms control, as well as involving them in political decision-making processes.[24]

At the Security Council meeting in April 2020, Secretary-General António Guterres presented his own assessment of the implementation of the YPS agenda and the five pillars[25] defined in Resolution 2250.[26] Guterres had already highlighted how important he considered the issue to be during the 2018 General Assembly by presenting "Youth 2030: The UN Youth Strategy", where he advocated for including youth in all areas of UN work (sustainable development, human rights, peace and security, humanitarian assistance). In his report to the Security Council, Guterres drew a link between a lack of opportunities for youth participation and development, which leads to frustration and mistrust of policymakers, and provides a breeding ground for targeting by extremist groups. Despite initial progress, structural barriers to formal involvement of youth in political processes, elections, and peace processes remain, even though opportunities for youth to make an impact are manifold, and could increase the legitimacy of these processes.

Despite initial progress, structural barriers to formal youth involvement in political processes remain.

One of Guterres' demands is, therefore, to also involve youth more in dialogues at the local, national, and international levels, to support their existing activities in monitoring ceasefire agreements, and in conflict mediation at the local level, and above all to make even greater use of the opportunities for involvement through social media. In particular, the potential for youth to influence conflict parties not only at the negotiating table, but also through external pressure remains too often untapped, or indeed, deliberately blocked by decision-makers. Young women are particularly affected by this, as they are marginalised on the basis of both age and gender, and also face intimidation, harassment, and, in some cases, violent attacks in the political arena.

The Security Council resolutions aim not only to support the peace work of young people, but also to protect them in violent conflicts. In his report, Secretary-General Guterres also explicitly points out the threats which young people are exposed to in their peace work, and in their efforts to protect human rights. Intimidation and attacks affect young people, and in some cases their families as well, and they often go unpunished. Guterres, therefore, appeals to the member states to pay more attention to human rights violations against youth, to prosecute them legally, and to strengthen their networks and organisations in the sense of the partnerships called for in the resolutions. In the context of prevention, Secretary-General Guterres stresses that the creation of employment, education, and development opportunities should be understood as part of the prevention agenda, and seen as investments in peace and security. In this context, he noted that it is also important to ensure that youth have a say in policy formulation in all policy areas that affect them, such as health and education.

Guterres believes a similar approach is also needed in the area of disengagement and reintegration. In the Central African Republic, the DR Congo, Mali, and Sudan, the UN is involving former youth combatants in the design, planning, and implementation of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes. The goal is to reduce the potential for violence by employing a holistic approach, especially at the local and community levels. The Secretary-General sees a need for improvement in this area, particularly in the inclusion of young women, who – although their numbers in armed units are increasing – are often not yet sufficiently addressed in the formulation and implementation of DDR programmes.

With regard to the work of the Security Council, Guterres recommends systematic inclusion of youth in country-specific and thematic discussions, and greater consideration of youth as peacebuilding actors when updating the mandates of UN peacekeeping missions. Between 2015 and the end of 2019, only 24 per cent of peace mission mandate renewals included references to the role and importance of youth in peacebuilding. There is now a youth engagement coordinator in 14 of the 22 UN political missions. For actual peacekeeping missions, the record is far worse: only 3 of the 13 blue helmet missions have a YPS point person. The Security Council itself tried to live up to its commitment to hold appropriate consultations during at least half of its visits to the areas of operation.

Half of the youth organisations active in peace and security operate on an annual budget of less than 5,000 US dollars.

At the member state level, the issue of YPS developed good momentum. National coalitions and platforms were formed in conflict states, such as Afghanistan, DR Congo, Central African Republic, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. A "Group of Champions" was formed in 2017 under the leadership of Jordan and Norway. Countries like Colombia, Nigeria, and the Philippines are in the process of developing national action plans in line with the Women, Peace and Security theme, thus creating a binding political framework at the country level. Despite this progress, there is still a need for improvement in the actual involvement of youth in peace negotiations that goes beyond an observer role. Too often, one hears from youth organisations represented in peace processes that: "We may be sitting in the same room, but we're not at the negotiating table."[27]

In addition, member states at both the national and UN levels must ensure that funding opportunities for youth peace activities improve. Fifty per cent of youth organisations active in peace and security operate on an annual budget of less than 5,000 US dollars.[28] A key donor for YPS activities is now the Peacebuilding Fund, which UN member states sponsor through the Peacebuilding Commission. The annual Youth Promotion Initiative increased the distribution

from 2.7 million US dollars in 2016 to 20.4 million US dollars in 2019. Moreover, with the development of a strategic action plan on youth and peacebuilding, the initiative established not only a binding but also a verifiable framework, including the definition of core activities, and associated variables for measurement. Forty per cent of funding goes directly to civil society organisations for their activities and to strengthen their capacities.[29] Despite this progress in the UN context, which concerns operational measures in addition to the legal framework set out in UN Resolutions 2250 and 2419, Secretary-General Guterres sees the need for further action by the UN. In his review, he points out areas for improvement, such as: the integration of the YPS agenda into UN strategies, planning documents, and conflict analyses; the protection of youth peace activists; and the establishment of coordinators and focal points for YPS at the country and regional levels, as well as at headquarters in New York.[30]

Anchoring Youth, Peace and Security on the Security Council Agenda – UN Resolution S/RES/2535 (2020)

In order to give more binding force to the Secretary-General's demands in addressing the shortcomings in implementing the YPS agenda, France as a permanent member of the Security Council and the Dominican Republic as an elected member drafted another resolution, S/RES/2525 (2020), which was unanimously adopted in the Security Council in July 2020 under the German presidency.[31] The formulations in the resolution regarding the protection of human rights, access to justice, the integrity of rule-of-law institutions, the creation of a safe environment for youth to engage in peace activities, and the protection of civil and political spaces are extremely positive, albeit surprising given the growing confidence of autocratic regimes such as Russia and China.[32] In the context of the resolution, the Secretary-General is urged to take into account the needs of youth peace activists within the framework of the Common Agenda on Protection for the UN System, in particular those working with the UN. The members of the Security Council also call on all UN institutions to expand youth participation in all areas of the YPS agenda and, in particular, to strengthen the capacities of youth in relation to their peace activities. Focal points are to be appointed for this purpose.

The Youth, Peace and Security Agenda is now to be incorporated into all UN strategic and planning documents.

In accordance with Resolution 2535, the peacekeeping missions should include guidelines for developing a strategy to implement the YPS agenda, and incorporate it into all strategic and planning documents of the UN. Plus, civil society and youth organisations are to be given a greater voice in Security Council briefings. With regard to the call for more youth involvement in formal peace processes, and the need for policy initiatives to create improved frameworks for peacebuilding (economic development, training opportunities, employment opportunities, and political participation), Resolution 2535 reinforces the demands of previous resolutions. By stipulating that the Secretary-General must report on the progress of the YPS agenda every two years, Resolution 2535 places YPS firmly on the Security Council's agenda for the first time, and urges member states to show greater commitment and political will in its implementation.

A Positive Balance Sheet and Encouraging Momentum

Considering that little more than five years have passed since the adoption of Resolution 2250, and comparing it to the slowness of other processes, it can be said that the importance of youth to conflict resolution, their positive peacebuilding work, and the need for their inclusion in official processes has now found international consensus. Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535 established a legally binding framework for the

Former child soldier in South Sudan: Today, the UN is increasingly involving former youth combatants in efforts of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration in Sub-Saharan Africa. Source: © Andreea Campeanu, Reuters.

YPS agenda, which must now be operationally implemented by the UN, the members of the Security Council, and by the international community of UN members.

With the European Conference on YPS (2018), the EU consultation process on "The Missing Peace" (2018), and the European Council conclusions on the role of youth in establishing

secure, united, and conflict-free societies, the European Union has gone beyond mere political symbols early on. The EU's commitment is also exemplary in the operational sphere. The European Instrument for Stability and Peace has already made it possible to implement over 60 programmes that strengthen the role of youth in crisis management and peacekeeping.[33]

At the member state level, and this includes Germany, far less importance is attached to the issue. Youth delegates attending events at the UN General Assembly in New York can indeed generate interest in the United Nations in Germany.[34] However, the YPS issue requires a much more strategic approach. Finland, which in 2021 became the first EU member to adopt a national action plan on YPS, is playing a pioneering role here.

Structural changes, especially at the national level, need to increase youth participation in political processes, improve their capacities, and increase funding opportunities. As the discussions on implementing the YPS agenda in the Arria format[35] in September and December 2020 in the Security Council demonstrated, the topic is enjoying a boom, as it is helping to shape the paradigm shift in peacekeeping towards inclusive processes and the involvement of diverse actors. Much preparatory work for the establishment of a YPS agenda has been done in the area of Women, Peace and Security (WPS), which has already taken into account another marginalised group in peacekeeping. Moving into the future, it will certainly be even more necessary to coordinate both agendas, especially in their implementation, to prevent the cannibalisation of funding opportunities or a competitive situation. Both agendas clearly intersect, and the needs and opportunities of young women need more attention in all five pillars of the YPS agenda. When it comes to YPS, the elected members of the Security Council have shown that it is possible to set off a positive motion in the area of peace and security and to build consensus even in times of new geopolitical rivalries. The momentum needs to be sustained – the issue needs to continue to be moved forward; it should not only reappear on the agenda of the Security Council when the next report of the Secretary General is presented.

– translated from German –

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1 The World Bank/UN 2018: Pathways for Peace. Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, in: https://bit.ly/3vL8Bv0 [26 Oct 2021].

2 UN Security Council 2020: Youth and peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/167), 2 Mar 2020, in: https://bit.ly/3meA70T [26 Oct 2021].

3 The progress report by UN external expert Graeme Simpson refers to data from 2016. With the increase in armed conflicts worldwide since 2010, combined with demographic trends, it is likely that the number of affected youth will far exceed 25 per cent. Simpson, Graeme 2018: The missing peace: independent progress study on youth and peace and security (A/72/761–S/2018/86), UN Security Council, 2 Mar 2018, in: https://bit.ly/3jDeghQ [26 Oct 2021]. See also Strand, Håvard / Hegre, Håvard 2021: Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2020, PRIO, Conflict Trends 03/2021, in: https://bit.ly/3vN6siA [3 Sep 2021].

4 Due to the divergent definitions of "youth" in the German, European, and UN contexts, this article considers the situation of children and young people from the perspective of the UN. The UN Security Council officially defines "youth" as people between the ages of 18 to 29 years old. Military recruits under the age of 18 are considered child soldiers, for example. UNICEF also uses the term "child" up to age 18.

5 UN 2021: COVID fuelling risk of recruitment and use of children in conflict, UN and EU warn on International Day, UN News, 12 Feb 2021, in: https://bit.ly/3vIyX0C [1 Sep 2021].

6 Save the Children 2021: One in Six Children Living in Conflict Zones at Risk of Sexual Violence by Armed Groups, 17 Feb 2021, in: https://bit.ly/3BlYQ7S [1 Sep 2021].

7 Although women are far more often victims of sexual violence in conflicts, the number of cases in which men are assaulted is increasing. The perpetrators try to demonstrate their power by giving men, especially young men, the feeling of being deprived of their dignity and masculinity, thus not only destroying their self-esteem but also degrading their standing in the family and community.

8 Omoeva, Carina / Moussa, Wael / Hatch, Rachel 2018: The Effects of Armed Conflict on Educational Attainment and Inequality, EPDC Research Paper No. 18–03, Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC), Apr 2018, in: https://bit.ly/3Gqdu1l [1 Sep 2021].

9 Somers, Marc 2018: Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism: Executive Summary, Promundo, in: https://bit.ly/2XQnWOs [1 Sep 2021].

10 UN Security Council 2020: 7432nd Meeting: Maintenance of international peace and security. The role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace (S/PV.7432), 23 Apr 2015, in: https://bit.ly/3b92mYf [1 Sep 2021].

11 UN Security Council 2015: Resolution 2250 (2015), 9 Dec 2015, in: https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2250(2015) [1 Sep 2021].

12 UN 2015: Amman Youth Declaration Adopted at Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, 22 Aug 2015, in https://bit.ly/2ZnFeTW [1 Sep 2021].

13 Simpson 2018, n. 3.

14 In contrast to vertical inequalities between individuals or individual households, horizontal inequalities refer to inequalities of opportunity that exist due to affiliations to certain groups (e.g. religious, ethnic).

15 UN Security Council 2018: Resolution 2419 (2018), 6 Jun 2018, in: https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2419(2018) [1 Sep 2021].

16 Security Council Report 2018: Youth, Peace and Security: Vote on Resolution, 5 Jun 2018, in: https://bit.ly/3EjjKpM [1 Sep 2021].

17 UN Security Council 2018: 8277th Meeting: Maintenance of international peace and security (S/PV/8277), 6 Jun 2018, in: https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.8277 [01.09.2021].

18 In addition to the AU example mentioned in the text, the European initiatives, especially from the OSCE, are also worth mentioning. The importance of youth for peace and security is not only mentioned in ministerial declarations, but concrete peace work is also being done through intergenerational platforms of dialogue in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. The OSCE Chairman has also appointed special representatives for youth and security.

19 AU 2018: Communique of the 807th meeting of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) on: "Youth, Peace and Security", 21 Nov 2018, in: https://bit.ly/3vK5rrn [6 Sep 2021].

20 AU 2020: A Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa. An Independent Expert Report Commissioned by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, Jun 2020, in: https://bit.ly/3jDgqOi [26 Oct 2021].

21 South Africa also managed to include in Resolution 2553 (2020) on Security Sector Reform (SSR), drafted under its leadership, a call for greater inclusivity in SSR processes and, in particular, for the role of youth in conflict prevention and peacebuilding to be recognised and given greater consideration.

22 UN Security Council 2019: Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2019/15), 12 Dec 2019, in: https://undocs.org/en/S/PRST/2019/15 [6 Sep 2021].

23 Security Council Report 2019: Peace and Security in Africa: Adoption of a Presidential Statement, 11 Dec 2019, in: https://bit.ly/3BgYMGr [6 Sep 2021].

24 UN Security Council 2019: 8577th Meeting: Maintenance of international peace and security. Implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda (S/PV.8577), 17 Jul 2019, in: https://bit.ly/3EiI5fq [6 Sep 2021].

25 The five pillars are: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration.
26 UN Security Council 2020, n. 2.
27 Berta, Michela 2020: Expanding Spaces for Inclusive Peacebuilding: Insight from the Torino Forum, United Nations system Staff College (UNSSC), 9 Dec 2020, in: https://bit.ly/3BkK9BD [1 Sep 2020].
28 Simpson 2018, n. 3.
29 UN Security Council 2018: Open Debate on Youth, Peace & Security – Statement by the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, 23 Apr 2018, in: https://bit.ly/3bgJruA [1 Sep 2021].
30 UN Security Council 2020, n. 2.
31 UN Security Council 2020: Resolution 2535 (2020), 14 Jul 2020, in: https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2535(2020) [1 Sep 2021].
32 "Reaffirms states' obligation to respect, promote, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals, including youth, and ensure equal access to justice and preserve the integrity of rule of law institutions; and to foster an enabling and safe environment for youth working on peace and security, including by protecting civic and political space and condemning hate speech and incitement to violence."
33 Aslani, Valentina 2021: Investing in youth for peace and security – A European perspective, ECDPM, Great Insights magazine 10: 1, 22 Mar 2021, in: https://bit.ly/3EiuXHf [15 Oct 2021].
34 Federal Foreign Office 2021: Young people and the United Nations, in: https://bit.ly/3cHJ6Sz [15 Oct 2021].
35 This format was launched by the then Venezuelan UN Ambassador Diego Arria in 1992. Until then, there had been no possibility to hear external experts or to put issues on the agenda if members had blocked them for a formal meeting of the Security Council.

Source: © Ammar Awad, Reuters.

Divided and yet United

The Palestinian Youth Faces a Contradictory Reality

Steven Höfner / Alena Jabarine

Palestinian youth is torn. Fragmented into the different Palestinian territories, young people live under various systems of government and can meet only in exceptional cases. They bear the trauma of previous generations within them and every day are subjected to the challenges of both an Israeli military occupation and repression by Palestinian regimes which are, at least partly, corrupt and authoritarian.

"For the first time, we were not divided into 2.5 million West Bankers, 2 million Gazans, 2 million Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and half a million East-Jerusalemites, no! For the first time, we were simply Palestinians. 7 million Palestinians!"
Haneen, 34, from Ramallah

Many images circulated around the world during the last military clash between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip in May 2021. Most of them were of Hamas rockets being intercepted by Israel's air defence system and of destruction in Israel and Gaza. But this escalation also gave rise to new images the likes of which had not been seen for a long time. They showed rebelling Palestinian youth that had organised – in demonstrations and protests and on social media. Hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #SaveSheikhJarrah went viral and dictated the trends on Twitter for days.[1] Celebrities such as top models Gigi and Bella Hadid and pop star John Legend declared their solidarity with the Palestinian protesters.

Unlike demonstrations in previous years, young people did not exclusively protest local problems such as the blockade in Gaza, Israeli settlement construction and the associated dispossession on the West Bank, and the destruction of houses in East Jerusalem. Instead, the protests were marked by joint slogans such as "End the occupation", "Save Sheikh Jarrah", and "End the siege on Gaza". In Ramallah, young people protested in solidarity with the Palestinian residents of Haifa, in Israel in solidarity with the residents of Gaza, and in Gaza in solidarity with residents of East Jerusalem threatened with forced eviction.

Nor were most of the protests organised by specific groups or political parties, but often spontaneous, although Hamas did attempt to assume a leadership role in many places.[2] Nevertheless, Palestinians primarily took to the streets with a feeling of unity: Muslims and Christians, young and old, students, feminists, trade unionists, and people from across the political spectrum. For many, the overall impression was one of upheaval.

And indeed, many Palestinians, especially the Palestinian youth, see the recent protest movement, which has been clearly reflected in social media, to have been the beginning of a new era, of a better future. However, closer examination quickly reveals that, while the protesting youth is convinced that the situation cannot remain as it is, there is as yet no unifying vision to strive towards. Moreover, realising any possible common denominator for the protests, such as ending Israeli occupation of the West Bank and dissolving or at least reforming the Palestinian National Authority (PA), appears to be a pipe dream in light of the existing balance of power. A close look at the challenges, hopes, and realities of life for young people in the Palestinian territories thus reveals a multifaceted reality of contradictions.

Currently, there are some 5.2 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,[3] which means the population has almost doubled

in the last 25 years.[4] The proportion of the population 29 or younger is 66 per cent[5], and the average age is 20.8.[6] While this age group is dominant, that reality is not reflected in the political and social power structures. Although those aged between 18 and 29 are increasingly visible in politics, as was the case in past protests, they have been unable to exert any influence on Palestinian politics to date. The ruling elite are more than 50 years older than the population average, and the average age of those on the Fatah Central Committee is 70. No member of the Palestinian leadership is younger than 35.[7] The last national elections were held 15 years ago. Young society's claims to political participation have thus been rejected by the established elite.

"The internet is everything for us. We communicate, learn, work through the internet. During airstrikes, we are being warned, the solidarity of the international community helps us to endure. I literally don't know how we would survive without the internet."
Iyad, 24, from Gaza

Palestinian youth is part of the universal Generation Z, but combines that cohort's characteristics with its own realities and experiences. The generation was socialised after the creation of the Palestinian National Authority in the Oslo Accords and the subsequent Second Intifada, and its members' lives have been shaped by increasing Israeli occupation, intra-Palestinian conflict between Fatah and Hamas, and growing PA authoritarianism. It has experienced extensive and constantly increasing Israeli control on the one hand, while living under a Palestinian self-rule whose institutions at least give the appearance of a system of government on the other. This parallelism leads to contradictory perceptions of the authorities among Palestinian youth, but in none of them do their needs and wishes play a significant role. In addition to the local experiences of the generation growing up in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, three locations that are extremely different from one another, there are three more regional and global strands of development: the "Arab Spring", the new digital world with its capabilities, and the modern globalised discourse among young people.[8]

The "Arab Spring" revealed that resistance to those in authority, including parents, public dignitaries, and members of national leadership, is possible despite the hierarchical social system.[9] The "Arab Spring" brought little mobilisation to the Palestinian territories and ultimately had no political impact there, yet its events, especially with respect to Egypt and confrontation with regional elites, made a lasting impression.[10]

Social media have become the gateway to the world for Palestinian youth.

Then there are the apparently limitless possibilities afforded by the digital world. Palestinian youth is now exposed to the attractions of Western consumer culture. For instance, online shopping has been established in the West Bank for several years, providing access to brands and goods that were unavailable there for a long time due to restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation. New Western-style cafes and restaurants have become popular meeting places. This makes life under the restrictions imposed by the occupiers more tolerable, reducing the urge to rebel. And for the Palestinian youth, social media have become their gateway to the world.

This is especially true of youth in the Gaza Strip, who, because of the blockade in place since 2007, have scarcely any opportunity to leave the coastal strip and interact with the outside world in person. Over the years, Hamas has cracked down hard on unorthodox opinions, intervened in school curricula, and implemented an Islamic fundamentalist moral code.[11] However, with the exception of pornography, Hamas scarcely censors the internet, which thus constitutes an unfamiliar sphere of freedom for those in Gaza.

Thus, intra-Palestinian discourse, which plays a central role in maintaining and reshaping the Palestinian national, cultural, and political identity, is only possible across borders and checkpoints with the help of social media. While young Palestinian people in Gaza are usually unable to visit Palestinians in the West Bank or Israel, social media facilitates intra-Palestinian discourse, professional and artistic cooperation, and even the formation of relationships and friendships, which counteracts alienation and fragmentation.

Above all, the internet allows Palestinian youth to participate in the modern discourse between young people worldwide and become aware of their rights as humans, individuals, and citizens, concerns that at times eclipse even the question of national rights. The link between Palestinian human rights and other human rights movements around the globe became especially clear with the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement originated in June 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, a black American, by a white policeman – a movement which young Palestinians also joined. To this day, Floyd's image can be seen on the Palestinian side of Israel's dividing wall in Bethlehem, and in Ramallah, houses were decorated with posters featuring George Floyd with Eyad Hallaq

and Razan al-Najjar, two Palestinian victims of Israeli police and military violence.[12] For many young Palestinians, Floyd, Hallaq, and al-Najjar are all victims of violence on the part of a racist government that they believe can be combatted only with the help of a global human rights movement.

"We didn't expect much from the outcomes of the elections, but we were so excited to participate in a democratic process for the first time, to feel that we might have a voice that actually counts! Just imagine, I am a 27-year-old journalist and I have never voted in my life. But when the elections were cancelled, me and my friends completely lost faith. After this disappointment, I literally don't know if anyone would register for future elections now at all."
Jalaa, 27, from Nablus

The contradictions for Palestinian youth continue in the social and economic context. They strive for education, a career, and internationalisation, but are thwarted by unemployment, poverty, and travel restrictions. Increasing interaction through social media also provides the Palestinian youth with insights into and contact to other more liberal cultures that differ from the traditional conventions prevailing in many Palestinian families and everyday public life. It is therefore hardly surprising that many young Palestinian people suffer from a collective feeling of suffocation, difficulties in communicating with their parents, and a deep disaffection with political leadership.[13] And the perception is not only that of an elite that has been in power for decades pursuing primarily private interests. The resulting distance leads to growing dissatisfaction with state institutions and political parties.

← Crossing borders: A portrait of George Floyd is seen on the Palestinian side of the Israeli separation wall in Bethlehem. Young Palestinians increasingly put their protest into an international context. Source: © Mussa Qawasma, Reuters.

So far, it has not been possible to channel this dissatisfaction into new political movements and parties. Both the Fatah-led Palestinian National Authority and Hamas in the Gaza Strip prevent new parties from registering – neither entity ever established a law governing political parties.[14] After national elections were announced at the beginning of 2021, some 30 electoral lists that were officially independent from the already existing parties were registered. But their campaigns would have been limited to only four weeks, organisational structures resembling parties must not be established. Surveys showed that these lists posed no threat to established parties (apart from schisms in Fatah), since few of them had much of a chance of overcoming the two-per cent threshold.[15]

Both the Palestinian National Authority and Hamas prevent new parties from registering.

The elections, which many young Palestinians saw as a new impetus for democratisation, were ultimately cancelled under the pretext that East Jerusalem's voter turnout was not guaranteed. But it was obvious to the Palestinian youth in particular that the ruling Fatah, which was suffering from internal divisions, feared for its position of dominance in the West Bank in the face of a stable Hamas.[16] Once again, hopes for even a bit of progress away from the Palestinian gerontocracy were dashed. New projects for liberalising the ruling elite or even conducting elections are scarcely credible in the wake of this fresh disappointment.

Political activity in the Palestinian territories is also fraught with danger. Critics of the system are increasingly being interrogated or detained by Palestinian security forces.[17] Activism may also lead to problems with Israel, such as arrests or withdrawal of rights to leave the Palestinian territories or to enter Israel. The recent killing of political activist and system critic Nizar Banat

by Palestinian security forces demonstrated how high the price of freely expressing one's opinions can be. The violent suppression of subsequent protests by the Palestinian security apparatus in many West Bank cities also had an intimidating effect.[18]

These are all factors that deter many young Palestinians from making their voices heard politically. The limited prospects of success and great personal risks prompt many to pursue individual goals instead.

"If you are not the son or daughter of someone with influence, you will not be respected. And the politicians deciding about your life are three or four times older than you. There are the ruling people and there is us, the youth, no connection in between. This is our political system, a system of old men. It is frustrating to us."
Elias, 21, from East Jerusalem

Young Palestinians are thus interested in individual development and self-fulfilment, but restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation and the increasingly authoritarian Palestinian National Authority afford them few opportunities to pursue these goals. One reason for this is the patriarchal system, which is reflected in both politics and society as a whole: the elders have the power and use a strictly hierarchical system to reach decisions concerning the future. Young talent is largely left out. Fatah is especially wedded to the principle of seniority – with members acquiring one point for each year of membership, and the point total being used to qualify them for high-ranking positions. The Palestinian gerontocracy can thus be seen as a mirror of Fatah's internal organisational principles.

Participation in Hamas structures is tied to unconditional support for the organisation's Islamist ideology.

In the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, Hamas has held multiple internal elections since 2007, facilitating an internal party discussion but severely curtailing freedom of speech and the press for outsiders and meting out harsh punishment for critics.[19] Participation in Hamas structures is tied to unconditional support for the organisation's Islamist ideology. Nevertheless, support for Hamas is growing, especially in times of war or escalation.[20] Many Palestinians – even those whose political, ideological, and even religious views are far removed from those of Hamas – often perceive this organisation to be the only power that can oppose Israel

Bleak prospects? Although Palestinian society's level of education is considered good in international comparison, a rigid educational system and poor chances on the labour market cause frustration among young people.
Source: © Mohammed Salem, Reuters.

in such times. Particularly during the May 2021 escalation, this assessment was coupled with the disappointment many felt towards President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian National Authority, including Fatah, which scarcely appeared during the protests that took place in all Palestinian cities.

However, patriarchal and hierarchical structures are not the only influences in Palestinian society. Ongoing political rifts between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank owing to rivalry between Hamas and Fatah create deepened factionalism and even break up families. Nevertheless, some young Palestinian people are following the political example of their parents, since membership in one of the two parties at least theoretically gives them a chance to get a job and to be heard. On the other hand, young Palestinians are continuously labelled based on their families' perceived political orientation, even though it may not be

their own. Factionalism and party affiliation give rise to ubiquitous expectations of a person's own camp. Since both Fatah and Hamas dominate the public sector in their respective entities and are thus the primary employers, corruption is endemic.[21] Those who want to get ahead must find a party patron. Most young Palestinians believe this to be harmful, but are nevertheless frequently, even if involuntarily, pressurised into such dependencies through the education or labour market.

"I studied sports, I was a handball player for the national team. But now I work as a day labourer in Israel. Every day in the morning, I cross the barrier at a different spot. What shall I do? Over there, I earn three times more money than here and I need the money to start a family. I have no choice."
Yazan, 29, from Tulkarem

Economic prospects are also gloomy. Restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian National Authority's at times seemingly arbitrary bureaucracy make a flourishing economy or the development of new entrepreneurial ideas virtually impossible. As a result, many young Palestinians are primarily focused on developing the capacity for earning a living – so political involvement is not a top priority.

Phenomena such as criminality, suicide, prostitution, and drug addiction are increasing.

Palestinian society's level of education is considered good in international comparison, but there is still a great deal of frustration in this area. The percentage of university graduates in the Palestinian territories varies by region from 14 per cent (Hebron) to 23.4 per cent (Ramallah).[22] Still, an unemployment rate of 53 per cent (and as much as 72 per cent in the Gaza Strip) often leads to a severe personal crisis triggered by disappointed expectations of life after university and the reality of unemployment.[23] Phenomena such as criminality, suicide, prostitution, drug addiction, divorce, emigration (where possible), and difficulties starting families are therefore increasing among highly educated individuals.[24]

In addition to the high percentage of academics, there is also a high percentage of dropouts: 25 per cent of 15-year-olds have dropped out of school.[25] The primary reasons for this are the insufficiently stimulating educational environment resulting from a rigid educational system, a shortage of schools that leads to packed classrooms, and interruptions of school attendance due to arrests (primarily affecting young men). Poor economic conditions prompt many children to leave school to feed their families or seek independence from them. Young women often prefer the option of marrying young in order to relieve financial strain on their families. The poor prospects of getting a job suitable for a university graduate lead many young people to wonder why they should waste their time and money if the unqualified or illegal Israeli labour market promises higher wages than qualified work in the West Bank.[26] For instance, it has now been well documented that, particularly in Palestinian cities near the Israeli barrier, young Palestinians slip through holes in the barrier onto Israeli territory where they work as cheap, unauthorised labour in such jobs as gastronomy or construction.

"The youth in Jerusalem has no one who speaks or advocates for them. But in the recent months, they were able to voice themselves. They found ways to stand up for their rights and to spell out that East Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine."
Rami, 43, from East Jerusalem

East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel, received special international attention during the last war. It was not just that Hamas in the Gaza Strip used violent clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli army at the Al-Aqsa Mosque as an

excuse to fire rockets into Israeli territory. Even after the cease-fire, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, national and religious symbols for Palestinians and for Muslims worldwide, repeatedly became the focus of protests and clashes. These clashes were often provoked by extreme right-wing settler organisations planning marches through Muslim areas of the Old City of Jerusalem, sometimes supported and accompanied by sympathetic members of Israel's Knesset. Many Palestinian Israelis from other cities then travelled to Jerusalem to show support for East Jerusalem residents and defend Palestinian national interests at the Dome of the Rock.

This is a significant development in light of the fact that, over recent years, many young people in East Jerusalem have undergone a process of "normalisation", of adapting to the lifestyle prescribed by Israeli politics and society. This is mainly due to the assumption that no independent Palestinian state would emerge, and that East Jerusalem, annexed as it was by Israel, would have no part even if it did.[27] Cut off from the Palestinian hinterland in the West Bank, without prospects for political union, and suffering pervasive discrimination in Israel's society and economic and legal systems without rights of codetermination[28], youth in East Jerusalem suffer from dangerous levels of disillusionment. Combined with factors such as unemployment, poverty, and aggression from Israeli settlers, this hopelessness among young people living in Jerusalem is prompting a growing number to view "heroic martyrdom" as desirable.[29]

Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem are de facto left to their own devices.

East Jerusalem was annexed in 1980, and subsequent Israeli governments pursued an active policy of settling Israeli citizens there, including the destruction of houses, intensified settlement, and revocation of Palestinian identity cards. Therefore, it cannot be expected that Israeli governments will address the plight of Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem or develop programmes for youth in the foreseeable future. For its part, the Palestinian government in annexed East Jerusalem has no power to act, so young Palestinians there are de facto left to their own devices.

It is all the more notable, then, that it was East Jerusalem and the political activities of the youth there that put Palestinian human rights back on the international agenda. The protesting residents of the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan enjoyed unprecedented prominence. Mona and Mohammad al-Kurd, twins faced with forced evictions, became new icons of the Palestinian youth movement and were hosted on almost all major international news programmes. The question of whether this wave of solidarity will actually bring about local political change over the long-term is what currently preoccupies many Palestinian activists in East Jerusalem.

> **"The last few months alone were very hard. It is difficult to stay hopeful and to feel like I could make a difference. Especially when so many elements are beyond your control. My friends and my peers are the ones who teach me every day that we as Palestinians have the power to use our voices. We will continue until we are heard."**
> *Ayat, 25, from Ramallah*

The contradictory picture that emerges when examining the realities of life for Palestinian youth in the Palestinian territories shows why, thus far, many young Palestinians prefer the option of coming to terms with the system in which they live (Israeli military occupation, Palestinian National Authority rule, the Hamas regime) rather than rebelling against it. Despite the possibilities of the internet for establishing contact with the outside world and with each other and finding out about their own rights, geographical separation and differences in forms of government often prevent them from

engaging in major joint political activities. At the same time, young people often feel helpless in the face of the power, numbers, and occasional propensity to violence of the Israeli military, the Palestinian security forces, and Hamas, while also feeling abandoned by an international community that is unable to support them in the defence of their fundamental rights.

Despite this extremely gloomy situation, the Palestinian youth still manage to surprise us time and again with their drive, optimism, and creativity. Not only are Palestinians well-educated by global standards, but recent years have seen an increase in the number of new companies founded. Young Palestinians generate enthusiasm among young people the world over for the legitimacy of demands for human rights. For many young Palestinians, simply staying and refusing to emigrate is still considered the highest form of resistance, as reflected by the "Existence is resistance" slogan.

That this is true despite the difficult, unjust realities of life gives hope that the Palestinian youth have not yet relinquished the dream of a life of dignity. But it is also clear that given the Israeli policy of occupation, the continued gerontocracy of the Palestinian National Authority, and the repression of Hamas, the dream of a better future will not become a reality any time soon.

– translated from German –

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Source: © Christophe Van der Perre, Reuters.

Both Feared and Courted

Youth in the Spotlight of African Politics

Anna Reismann / Benno Müchler

At over 60 per cent of the population, the generation under the age of 25 represents the largest demographic group in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet most African governments fail to engage young people. While the African Union (AU) has made important progress towards improving youth policy, its ideas often lack practical solutions and are seldom implemented by member states. The latter, for their part, place too much emphasis on employment policy. Instead, the AU and its member states should do more to foster young people's participation in politics and civil society.

"This victory is not mine, but for all the citizens of our great country, especially the youth who turned out to vote in great numbers with great energy..." Cheers rang through the packed Heroes National Stadium in Zambia's capital Lusaka, interrupting the newly elected president's speech. He paused briefly, adjusted his COVID mask and returned his gaze to the speech. "This victory is not mine, but it is for all citizens of our great country, especially the youth, youth of Zambia, who turned out to vote in great numbers with great energy and passion, and made this day possible. Thank you to the youth of Zambia."[1]

In late August 2021, virtually unnoticed by the German public, Hakainde Hichilema was sworn in as the seventh president of Zambia, one of the most stable democracies on the African continent. Since Africa's second-largest copper producer opened up its democracy in 1990, many, though not all, of its changes in leadership have been achieved through free and fair elections. In three instances, the government was replaced by the opposition.[2] This election, too, conformed to what has been a somewhat unusual pattern for Africa, despite brief concerns that the defeated incumbent, Edgar Lungu, would not voluntarily hand over the reins when he did not initially recognise the outcome.

His presidency will be remembered as one in which freedoms were severely curtailed. Among other abuses, he had his political rival, Hichilema, arrested and held in custody for 100 days. The latter has now – on his sixth run for office – been elected president of the country.[3]

An Important Voting Bloc

Hichilema, who chairs the socially liberal UNDP (United Party for National Development), mainly rode to victory on the shoulders of the younger generation. "Belly will fix it" – a reference to Hichilema's nickname "Belly" – was a familiar campaign slogan, and now that the election has been won, the younger generation has high expectations that Belly will deliver. Youth unemployment is officially around 22 per cent,[4] and the rate of inflation in Zambia is 25 per cent. In 2020, GDP fell by 3 per cent.

"To the jobless youths", President Hichilema continued, "a new dawn is here where you will be skilled and you will find opportunity to work or do business. In an economy that we will revive [...]. Very, very soon."[5]

No Prospects

The youth of Africa cannot complain about a lack of attention on paper or in campaign speeches – neither in Zambia nor in the other countries on Europe's neighbouring continent. Some 60 per cent of the population of the 49 states in Sub-Saharan Africa are under 25 years of age. A demographic that is both feared and courted, they represent a potential force – one

of which governments and opposition are all too aware. However, as a rule, neither do much to bring young people on board. Promises go unfulfilled. Corruption persists. The mindset remains the same. The vast majority of the ailing national economies cling to old paradigms, failing to pick up on demographic developments in their countries. This means the continent does not make use of what is perhaps its most important resource – a resource that still has no prospects. Instead, poverty and migration pressure are on the rise, creating fertile ground for extremists.

A willingness for radical change is especially marked among young people in Uganda.

The images are familiar to anyone travelling through the continent's capitals and back country: in Addis Ababa, children roam the streets selling chewing gum and chocolate biscuits from wooden vendor trays. Between the cars parked at the ferry docks in Dar es Salaam, young men making chirping noises offer water from little plastic sachets. In villages in the Ivory Coast, the football pitch offers about the only diversion. Young girls help with the housework, while boys help in the fields and on the cacao plantation. Although primary and higher education opportunities have been greatly expanded across the continent over the past two decades, there are not enough jobs for all the school leavers and graduates.

Something's Brewing among Uganda's Youth

Uganda presents a similar picture. The year 2021 began in this land-locked East African country with the re-election of President Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power for 35 years. Most of the country's citizens had not yet been born when he first entered office: 46 per cent of the population is aged 14 or younger[6] and over three-quarters are under the age of 35.

Like in Zambia, the younger generation dominated the election in Uganda as well. The great desire for change in the world's second-youngest country – the average age here is currently 15.8[7] – can be felt everywhere. A willingness for radical change is especially marked among young people.

There are not enough jobs. Demographic pressure continues to mount, with Uganda having recorded constant population growth of over three per cent since the turn of the millennium. Should the current trend of 3.7 per cent remain the same, today's population of 47 million will double in less than 20 years.[8] An increasing number of people are pouring into the cities, and their resulting hopes and expectations are huge – as are their disappointments over unfulfilled desires.

Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu – better known by his stage name of Bobi Wine – was the most successful at tapping into that sentiment during the election campaign. The 40-year-old former musician counteracted the president's omnipresent campaign slogan "Securing Your Future"[9] with his simple but drastic hashtag #WeAreRemovingADictator; a tactic that mobilised many supporters on social media. His powerful but short-lived wave of popularity also does little to hide the fact, however, that he too was unable to offer concrete solutions for young Ugandans. Instead, he fell into the category of politicians promising simple solutions to complex challenges. If, as so often happens after winning an election, a candidate fails to fulfil these promises, young people will retreat in disappointment, having lost faith in politics, and rightly so.

A Charter for Young People

In order to improve the situation for the continent's youth, the African Union incorporated the issue into its agenda 15 years ago. While the AU cannot create jobs, it can encourage its member states to formulate policies geared more strongly towards the interests and needs of young people.

At the General Assembly meeting held in 2006 in Banjul, Gambia – at that time still governed by dictator Yahya Jammeh – AU member states adopted the African Youth Charter, which remains in effect to this day. The document emerged against the backdrop of the Millennium Development Goals, which, in addition to eliminating extreme poverty and extreme hunger, were also intended to help provide comprehensive primary education and reduce

Young men in an open gold mine in Uganda: The discourse of some regional organisations gives the impression that e-government and e-commerce are the greatest concerns of African youth. However, by far the largest share of them live in rudimentary conditions or even in poverty. Source: © James Akena, Reuters.

infant mortality rates, among other goals. The preamble to the document adopted by the member states reads, "Convinced that Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead." This document defined "youthful" as between the ages of 15 and 35.[10]

Papers and Posts Alone Do Not Constitute Success

One of the key demands of the Charter is that all AU member states develop a "national youth policy" – provided they do not yet have one. The AU hoped to assume the role of coordinator, to foster knowledge sharing between member states, and to promote more opportunities for participation within the organisation. It took nearly four years for the document to come into effect, even though ratification by 15 member states was all that was required. Of the 55 AU member states, 39 have ratified the document to date.

At the same time as the Charter came into force in 2009, the AU General Assembly also adopted its "African Youth Decade 2009–2018 Plan of Action", formulating concrete steps for member states in order to implement the content of the Youth Charter. The AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) would provide support for developing policies and programmes aimed at raising public awareness of youth issues in Africa.

Who Are Africa's Youth? What Do They Want?

Today's Africa is different than it was at the time of decolonialisation, and thus its youth is not the same as the founding generation. "For them, the achievement was independence. But for us, we want a borderless continent. We want e-governance. We want to live on the internet, to innovate. We want e-commerce. We want to trade", says Aya Chebbi, who until recently was the African Union Youth Envoy.[11] The position was created as part of the Youth Decade Action Plan with the aim of fostering a stronger public role for Africa's youth. An avowed feminist, the Tunisian social media activist is young, female, a fighter: all these qualities look good in the public sphere. But do they represent Africa's youth? And are the things that Chebbi lists in an interview with Voice of America the things that African youth really want?

32 African states have now developed a national youth policy, but much has remained theoretical.

The image of a young, tech-savvy generation of Africans, one that wears hip fashion accessories and fits the stereotype of a vibrant start-up scene is accurate only to a limited extent. The majority of Africa's youth are poor and live – as most people generally do – in rural areas, cut off from basic infrastructure like running water and electricity, let alone fast internet. Moreover, if the term "youth" is interpreted as the stage of life between childhood and adulthood, then the expansion of basic and post-secondary education may well have extended this phase on the African continent as well. Yet the continent has not undergone an industrial revolution like that in the open societies of Western states. Traditional social structures with clear gender roles have endured. Unlike in the West, exploring your limits, finding yourself, being creative, and so on are reserved for very few young people in Africa.

A Mixed Picture

Just as the AU's understanding of Africa's youth – as conveyed in the person of Aya Chebbi, for instance – is misguided, the Charter as a whole needs to be viewed with a critical eye; despite constituting one of the most important initiatives and areas where the AU has made its mark to date. To begin with, there are a number of problems with the 22-page document in and of itself. It reads as though there were no

constitutions guaranteeing fundamental freedoms in force in Africa at the time of its formulation. It demands, for instance, freedoms of expression and assembly, access to education, healthcare, and many other rights for young people. Most of all, however, the AU Youth Charter has been unable to achieve any overall practical improvement to the youth policies of member states. While 32 African states have now developed a national youth policy,[12] much has remained theoretical – implementation continues to be the major problem. What is more, the majority of strategy papers give priority to employment policies.

A new youth policy for the African Union should focus on strong involvement of young people in civil society.

Youth Policy and Employment Policy Are Not the Same

The National Youth Policy of Ghana from 2010, for example, designates 19 areas in need of development, of which seven alone are dedicated to the economy.[13] The list of similar youth policies goes on. There is no doubt that youth employment is tremendously important for Africa's economic development – and represents an enormous opportunity, due to the size of its young, working-age population. "Real" youth policy, however, should be both more than and clearly distinct from employment policy. Especially given that the blame for unsuccessful employment policies can inherently be attributed to other causes (trade barriers, global recession, economic sanctions).

A Call to Reform AU Youth Policy

"I strive with the support of every one of you to take our Organisation out of our conference rooms, hard drives and tightly sealed files, and into the classrooms, the refugee camps, the markets of our cities and into the fields of our villages."[14] Today, 15 years after the formulation of the AU Youth Charter, the African Union should heed the words spoken by Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), at the beginning of his rotating presidency of the AU in 2021, and reform its youth policy. Aside from the fact that the charter predates several internationally important strategies and therefore does not mention them – in particular, the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN's Youth Strategy, and the AU's Agenda 2063 – a new AU youth policy needs to place an emphasis on supporting the young generation's great civil society engagement. A new policy should be separate from employment policies and general development plans, focusing instead on the unique skills and characteristics of young people and attempting to harness these for development processes. Whether in rural or urban areas, whether highly or poorly educated, young people everywhere share an eagerness and a drive to participate and change their circumstances and environment for the better. When it comes to bringing young blood into its own organisation, the African Union is setting a good example. During its summit meeting in early 2021, it decided to give priority to young applicants when filling entry-level positions.

For its member states, one option would be to set up targeted support programmes that would foster the social engagement of those young people advocating for their local environment, creating social opportunities for peers, or caring for weaker members of society. Efforts like these would not require major, financially backed programmes, new structures, or positions. Social cooperation strengthens social cohesion. The younger generation wants to have a role to play, to participate and to channel their energies.

A new AU youth policy should also attach greater importance to political participation and take this more seriously. While many member states have created national youth councils, some stronger than others, these generally attract little attention, and in autocratic states are largely

Leaving the conference halls? The president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has called on the African Union to engage more closely with the realities of life on the continent. The organisation's youth policy has often lacked practical relevance. Source: © Tiksa Negeri, Reuters.

dominated by ardent supporters of the governing party. A new AU youth policy should attempt to bolster the independence and advisory roles of member states' national youth councils, both locally and across regions.

Great Lakes Youth Network for Dialogue and Peace

A project in this vein and co-financed by the EU was recently launched by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Known as the Great Lakes Youth Network for Dialogue and Peace, the project aims to work with five local partners in the Great Lakes border region between the DR Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania to establish a network of youth initiatives committed to peace. These can cover a range of issues, including democracy, employment, climate, health, equal rights, and more. Over the past few years, many young people in this high-conflict region have taken matters into their own hands, hoping to make a difference in areas where political institutions have failed or do not have the resources to succeed. Over a period of three years, the project will select up to 120 initiatives, strengthen their internal capacities, draw them into a network – that also extends beyond the region – and place them in contact with national and international decision-makers from politics, business, development, civil society, science, the media, and culture. The objective is to amplify the voice of youth in decision-making processes and to foster dialogue.

Is a Youthful Parliament a Ray of Hope?

Like so much on the continent, the question of youth and youth participation will ultimately be determined by the political will of Africa's ruling class – and that has been lacking so far. A development playing out in Uganda and other countries, however, may help to counter the pessimistic view that nothing will ever change in Africa.

The under-25 generation made their voices heard and engaged in Uganda's most recent elections. Whether one supported them or viewed them with reservation, they could no longer be ignored – neither as voters nor as competitors for political office. Nearly 15 per cent of the representatives in Uganda's newly elected parliament are under 35. Of the 615 direct candidates in parliamentary elections, 28.5 per cent were below the age of 35. Among the 151 women running for office as district and city representatives, 17.5 per cent fell within this age group.[15] In 24 districts in the Central Region, young candidates managed to win 80 per cent of the offices up for re-election, in many instances prevailing over veteran incumbents.[16] The hope is that they will do a better job of representing the interests of their own demographic group. Of course, there are no guarantees.

From Theoretical to More Concrete Support for Youth

While Western countries need to keep an eye on these developments, they should not wait until African countries simply demonstrate more political will on their own. A poll conducted by Afrobarometer in 18 African countries among people between the ages of 15 and 35 revealed that 64 per cent of those surveyed were very dissatisfied with development in their countries. Relying on the countries' political stability over the next ten years is a gamble. Migration pressure will persist and continue to grow.[17]

Africa's future, both in terms of the economic development and political direction of the continent, depends on its youth. There are a number of options for promoting the younger generation. These include support for universities and training programmes geared towards administration in African states, as well as more internships and entry-level career opportunities with local offices of Western development and cooperation organisations. Learning about structures, organisation, and fixed workflows is often more sustainable than a well-intentioned climate programme.

French President Emmanuel Macron quite rightly made youth one of the fixed variables of his Africa policy, an approach he launched with his 2017 speech at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. Many representatives of Africa's youth were present at the Africa-France summit on 8 October 2021.[18] Macron once again demonstrated that he sees and recognises young people as important development partners alongside the states' executive organs. Likewise, the EU is placing greater emphasis on youth in its relations with the AU, having staged an Africa-Europe Youth Summit in the run-up to the 2017 AU-EU Summit in Abidjan.

For many years, the United States has also been running sponsorship programmes for elite young

Africans. An example of this is the Mandela Washington Fellowship Program created within the US State Department by former US President Barack Obama in 2014. With some 4,500 alumni[19] to date, the programme has established major networks between participants and the United States – these networks are now self-sustaining. After completing the programme, many fellows return to their home countries, where they work for American organisations.

Following these examples would be a positive step for the German Federal Government. An official seat could be granted for youth at the next German Africa summit for heads of state and government in Berlin. Another conceivable option would be programmes affiliated with the Chancellor's Office that would provide networking and exchange opportunities for young African elites and foster ties to Germany. The time for this is now.

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Source: © Paul Carsten, Reuters.

No Longer on the Sidelines? Youth and Politics

Old Rulers, Young People

Nigeria's Youth Excluded from Political Participation

Vladimir Kreck

Nigerian society is deeply divided. A large majority of young people is faced with an old political elite that clings to power. Gerontocracy is not only culturally conditioned, but also protected by law. Sharing power is not an option for the established ruling elite.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with over 200 million inhabitants, has a very young population. Over 60 per cent of people are below 24 years old; the average age is 18.1 years, with young people thus forming the majority. Nigeria has experienced many military dictatorships since its independence in 1960, and has only had an uninterrupted democratic constitution since 1999. The history of independent Nigeria produced a series of young dictators. General Yakubu Gowon was 31 years old when he became head of state in 1966. Subsequent military rulers, such as Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo, had not yet reached the age of 40 when they took power.

Today, in a democratically constituted Nigeria, we look in vain for young people to help shape the political destiny of their country. For almost two decades, Nigeria has been ruled by a political caste that is characterised above all by elite continuity. Muhammadu Buhari, the 78-year-old former general and the country's current president, exemplifies this. He already held the reins of government as head of the junta from 1983 to 1985. His 44-member cabinet, which had an average age of 61[1] in March 2021, includes many ministers who already held high political office in previous legislative periods or under the military dictator Sani Abacha in the 1990s. Representation of Nigerian youth is no better in Parliament either. The average age in the House of Representatives was 55.7 when MPs were sworn in in 2019.[2] And the Senate, for which no data is available but where many ex-governors and ex-ministers traditionally sit, is popularly mocked as the retirement home of ageing elites.

Young People Are Excluded by Law from Public Office

In Nigeria, people aged 18 and above are eligible to vote. The young are not apolitical, either. There are many who are interested in politics, and who want to get involved and to be part of the decision-making process. But most of them already fail due to the legal hurdles. This is because the constitution, adopted in 1999, sets age thresholds for candidates who want to stand for election to the highest political offices. The minimum age to run in gubernatorial or senatorial elections is 35. Until two years ago, the minimum age for running for the house of representatives, or for one of the 36 regional parliaments, was 30; the minimum age for running for the presidency, and thus for running the government, was 40.

Only under great pressure from civil society, and following a two-year campaign called "Not Too Young To Run", were youth organisations able to convince the national assembly and the president to reform the constitution in 2018. This constitutional reform came into force before the last presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019. Today, anyone who is at least 25 years old can run for a seat in the House of Representatives and in a regional parliament. The minimum age for a presidential candidacy has been reduced from 40 to 35. However, the minimum age has not been changed for the Senate or for gubernatorial elections.

Academics say that lowering age limits for political office can have a positive effect on young people's political engagement. Mona Krook and Mary Nugent, for example, state "lower age limits have immediate and longer-term

'mobilising effects', shifting the calculations of potential candidates in terms of the age at which they first decide to run for office".[3] Relevant analyses of the latest Nigerian presidential and parliamentary elections confirm this assumption; for instance, 14 per cent of the presidential candidates were between 35 and 40 years old.[4] The proportion of young people among the candidates also increased significantly in the elections for the House of Representatives and for the regional parliaments.[5]

Ultimately, however, the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 were largely unsuccessful for young candidates. For example, no candidate under the age of 30 was able to win a seat in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, only 13 MPs were aged between 30 and 35 when they took office. With 360 available seats, their share is only 3.7 per cent. At the regional level, at least 22 candidates between the ages of 25 and 30 succeeded in entering Parliament. However, this accounts for only 2.2 per cent of the 991 seats available nationwide. Another 68 MPs at the regional level, or 6.7 per cent of all MPs, were between 31 and 35 years old when they took office.[6]

Cultural Hurdles in the Political Arena

The legal barriers that exclude young people from political office in Nigeria are, first and foremost, an expression of the seniority principle, which is still deeply rooted across all ethnicities

Voters in front of a list of candidates in the 2019 presidential election: The proportion of young candidates for political office has increased slightly as of late, but the actual success of these candidates remains limited.
Source: © Afolabi Sotunde, Reuters.

and religions in Nigeria. According to this principle, only older people are considered to have the necessary level of knowledge and experience for making important political decisions. Young people, on the other hand, are assumed to be too immature and inexperienced to participate responsibly in political decision-making processes. The enforcement of the seniority principle in Nigeria goes far beyond these stereotypes. Already in the family, then at school, and later at university, young people are raised to accept the old tradition of gerontocracy. They learn that a claim to power and dominance only comes with advanced age, and that they must therefore be subordinate to their elders.

The bourgeois elite was responsible for setting the high age limits for political office so as to secure its claim to power against younger competition.

This concept of social hierarchy continues in professional life. Here, older people among equals are promoted first, and, where this principle is violated, it is considered that older people should retire, or be transferred. The reason for the latter is that older people are thought to be unwilling to be subordinate to those younger than themselves. To avoid conflict, it is thus necessary for them to retire, or be transferred. A recent case in Nigeria that attracted special attention in this regard was the appointment of General Farouk Yahaya as Chief of Army Staff. The 55-year-old Yahaya was surprisingly appointed by the president in May 2021 to succeed General Ibrahim Attahiru, who had died shortly before. The day after his appointment, the Nigerian press was already speculating about the number of generals of equal or higher rank who would have to retire because of their age. After all, they noted, this is a tradition in the armed forces. It is now clear that at least 29 generals are to retire.[7]

Securing Power through Exclusion

In Nigeria, the constitutional exclusion of young people from the highest political offices must be evaluated against a second background. The democratic transition process in 1998 and 1999 was also partly the responsibility of a bourgeois elite that had been denied political office for a long time, and which has shown little willingness to share power since the democratisation of the country in 1999.

Its rise was initially prevented by the military dictators Muhammadu Buhari from 1983 to 1985, and Ibrahim Babangida from 1985 to 1993. A tragic event in the memory of this elite was the failed presidential election in 1993. This election was supposed to usher in a new democratic era following ten years of military rule. The bourgeois elite rallied around Moshood Abiola, the Social Democratic presidential candidate. He won the election, but it was annulled by the military. In the same year, General Sani Abacha was able to seize power and establish a police state. It was only when Abacha died unexpectedly in 1998 that the bourgeois elite, which had failed to benefit from the 1993 elections, saw a new opportunity to come to power through democratic elections. It was also responsible for setting in constitutional law the high age thresholds for political office. This primarily served to secure the elite's claim to power – not only in the first presidential and parliamentary elections in 1999, but for two decades – against the up-and-coming, younger competition.

It then fits that Nigeria's two major parties have not yet made any serious efforts to produce self-organised and opinionated youth associations close to the party, which could serve as a platform for young politicians. The first ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which managed to stay in power uninterruptedly from 1999 to 2015, and which has been by far the largest opposition in the national assembly since 2015, recruited its functional elite from the bourgeois camp that was denied the possibility to take power by democratic means in 1993. It was not in the interest of this elite to

share power with younger generations, or to extend intra-party competition for positions and offices to younger people.

In turn, the current ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), emerged in 2013 from an alliance of opposition parties that were unable to prevail against the PDP until the 2015 elections. Its functional elite originates from the same bourgeois camp foiled by the annulled 1993 election. It also benefited from a large number of defections of politicians who had not made it in the PDP for many years.

The winner of an election is often the one who can raise the most money.

Financial Barriers to Political Participation

Transfers from one party to another are typical in Nigerian politics. These defections usually take place in the run-up to presidential and parliamentary elections. Such shifts should be understood in light of the fact that parties in Nigeria are hardly distinguishable from each other, ideologically. Parties are described as "platforms" with which to win political office. Party manifestos, on the other hand, are of little importance, and are not the reason why someone decides to join or leave one party in favour of another. It is usually about any personal advantage that can result from party membership. Again, this has a lot to do with the understanding of the state and politics in Nigeria. Many Nigerians share the view that a political mandate is the quickest way to wealth. This refers less to the comparatively lavish salaries that are reported to come with ministerial and gubernatorial posts or seats in Parliament in Nigeria, but above all to the opportunity to enrich oneself with state funds. For decades, the country has suffered from endemic corruption, which is also so lucrative because Nigeria is one of the largest oil exporters in the world, and large parts of the state budget are financed by oil revenues.[8] Thus, in the ranking of the most corrupt countries in the world, published by Transparency International, Nigeria has long ranked in the bottom (most corrupt) third. In 2020, it ranked 149 out of 180, together with countries such as Iran and Cameroon.[9]

The monetary incentives that come with political office result in two things: first, patronage, nepotism, cronyism, and dependency relationships play a crucial role when nominating candidates for political office. The decision on a nomination is often made in the background by party giants who have a lot of money and can protect a candidate. This is helpful insofar as nominations often have to be bought by bribing party delegates. Second, in a relative majority electoral system, election campaigns are fought relentlessly and elections are often decided by electoral fraud in the form of vote buying. The decisive principle here is *the winner takes it all*. The winner of an election is then often the one who can raise the most money.

So, money ultimately determines the political participation of individuals in a country whose predominantly young population is among the poorest in the world. At the end of 2020, 51 per cent of people in Nigeria were estimated to be living in extreme poverty.[10] High unemployment and the slide into the informal sector mean that many people live from hand to mouth. In turn, only a few are sufficiently socio-economically privileged that they can afford to bid with others for political office.

Great Hope, Great Disappointment

There was great euphoria, especially among young people in Nigeria, when Muhammadu Buhari was elected president in 2015. Despite his already advanced age, many associated him with the hope of a better future. Buhari was considered to have integrity. After all, he was said not to have enriched himself from the state coffers as head of the junta in the 1980s. And Buhari and his party, the APC, promised change after 16 years of PDP rule. The terrorist militia group Boko Haram was to be defeated in just a

few months. The weakening economy was to recover within a short period of time, and young people in particular were to be given new opportunities. Buhari also announced that he would take consistent action against the endemic corruption, including among the political elites. For this reason in particular, he achieved something with the APC in 2015 that had never been achieved before in Nigeria, and only rarely elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa – a democratically legitimised, peaceful transfer of power from one party to another.

The electorate could either give their vote to an old man who had disappointed them for four years or to his equally ageing opponent who was tainted with allegations of corruption.

However, when Buhari ran for re-election in 2019, not much was left of the former euphoria. Living conditions in the country had not improved; instead, they had deteriorated. Meanwhile, 48 per cent of the population was living in extreme poverty. Unemployment and underemployment had reached a new peak of 42 per cent. In addition, around 40 per cent of the population was still not connected to the electricity grid. The country's roads remained dilapidated. Corruption among the political elite had not noticeably decreased. Boko Haram had not been defeated, and rising violent crime was spreading throughout the country.

Under Buhari, the prospects of young people in particular had deteriorated significantly. In the latest Global Youth Development Index and Report, published in 2020, and comparing survey results from 2016 and 2019, Nigeria ranked 161 out of 181 countries surveyed.[11] This means the country has slipped 20 places in just three years. The study gave the national education system a particularly poor report. Only about 60 per cent of people under 25 are said to have a minimum level of literacy. Around 30 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 neither attend school, nor have an apprenticeship or job.

The fact that Buhari and the APC were nevertheless able to win the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019 may not have been due so much to alleged electoral fraud, but rather to the PDP's frontrunner for the presidency. The largest opposition party had nominated 72-year-old Atiku Abubakar, a former senior customs official, who had gained wealth with businesses in the logistics and oil sectors, and had already co-ruled the country as vice president from 1999 to 2007. During the election campaign, however, Atiku was troubled by old corruption allegations. As vice president, he is said to have enriched himself in the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. The predominantly young electorate was thus faced with a dilemma. They could either vote for an old man who had disappointed them for four years, or for his opponent who was just as old and could not get rid of the corruption allegations. What the country actually needed was a new, fresh candidate in this presidential election – someone who would have stood credibly for a future-oriented Nigeria. But the old-established elites of the country's two largest parties continued to cling to power.

Alternative Forms of Political Participation

Young people in Nigeria are ultimately forced to resort to situational, issue-based political activities. These activities are often protest-oriented, and mainly take place on social media. Indeed, over the last two decades, it has been rare for young people to gather on the cities' streets for demonstrations. One of the few exceptions was the EndSARS protests in October 2020. Thousands of young people protested peacefully against police violence for three weeks, mainly in the country's Christian south, in the metropolis of Lagos, and the capital Abuja.

The impetus for the protests came from a viral video, which suggested that police forces of the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad had

beaten a young Nigerian man to death in the open street and stolen his car. The squad, known as SARS for short, has been accused of serious crimes against humanity for years. Its members were allegedly guilty of kidnapping, extortion and torture, as well as robbery and murder. Amnesty International had published a report on this just a few months before the protests. It documented at least 82 cases of serious human rights violations, allegedly committed by the special unit over a period of three years. Most of the victims are said to have been between the ages of 18 and 30.[12]

The youth was demonstrating against police violence, poor governance, corruption, patronage, and nepotism.

Political leaders had known about the allegations against the special unit for many years, but they had done nothing. The youth now took their protest to the streets under the hashtag #EndSARS with a force and tenacity that surprised the government. Even when the president gave in to the pressure and ordered the disbandment of the special unit, the protests continued. The youth were no longer demonstrating against police violence only, but now also against poor governance, corruption, patronage, and nepotism among the political elites.

It was not long before images of peaceful demonstrators alternated with images of burning police stations and groups of young men marching through the streets armed with sticks and machetes. Accusations quickly arose on social media that the secret service was organising the violence in the background to give the security forces a reason to use violence against the peaceful EndSARS movement. On the night of 20 to 21 October, the protests came to an abrupt end. Army personnel and police fired live ammunition at peaceful demonstrators in Lagos. According to Amnesty International, twelve people were killed and many injured.[13] In November 2021, an independent commission of inquiry set up by the government of Lagos State determined that the armed forces and police had committed acts that could "be described as a massacre".[14]

Maintaining Power through Repressive Measures

The incident in Lagos must be seen as a repressive intervention in the rights of young people, with which the country's ruling elite wanted to assert its claim to power. The message to Nigeria's youth was that they should not rebel against the established ruling structures. The government further reinforced this message in the months that followed. It cracked down on the predominantly young, internet-savvy supporters of the peaceful protests by blocking bank accounts and preventing them from leaving the country. Since June 2021, Twitter has also been blocked in Nigeria. This was the main medium through which the youth organised their protest, and through which they received international encouragement. The then presidential candidate and current US President Joe Biden, former US President Bill Clinton, international pop stars, football players from top European clubs, and, last but not least, Twitter founder Jack Dorsey tweeted their solidarity with the protest movement. Even then, Nigerian government officials sharply criticised the role of Twitter. When Twitter deleted a message from Buhari in June 2021, in which he threatened an ethnic section of the population with violence, the government took this as an opportunity to remove the service from the national network. In early October 2021, the president held out the prospect that the Twitter block could be lifted if a number of conditions were met, such as ensuring that it was only available to Nigerian users for business purposes and positive activities.[15]

Many in Nigeria see the blocking of Twitter as a threat to freedom of expression, also in light of the fact that journalists are increasingly prevented by state authorities from reporting freely. In the Reporters Without Borders ranking, the country has fallen eight places since

Buhari came to power, and is now ranked 120 out of 180. The organisation judges the working conditions of the press as particularly bad. Journalists have to fear intimidation, summons, arrest, interrogation, and ill-treatment if they report critically on the work of the government.[16] To make matters worse, since Buhari came to power, bills have been debated in both houses of the national assembly for further severe restrictions on the use of social media, or at least to have it controlled by the state. A national identification number, introduced by the state in December 2020, is also considered a prerequisite for obtaining a private mobile phone contract. Experts and journalists see this state-organised registration as a government instrument to monitor the population's information flows in the future.

Poor Prospects for Young People in Nigeria

Most recently, since the violent culmination of the EndSARS protests, it has become more than obvious that Nigerian society is deeply divided. Young people, and thus the majority of the population, are confronted with an ageing functional elite that stands for an encrusted political system riddled with corruption. The modern, globally-minded, and internet-savvy youth in Lagos no longer feels represented by this political elite. But in the rest of the country, too, the discontent among young people is probably high in view of the rampant lack of work and prospects. The Africa Polling Institute recently published a study showing that only 26 per cent of the population still trusts Buhari's government.[17]

According to the same study, 73 per cent of the respondents would now like to leave the country if given the chance.[18] Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU was considered an attractive destination for Nigerian migrants. For many years, there were more Nigerian asylum applications in the EU than from any other African country. There were 25,000 in 2018, for example. In Germany, Nigeria also often ranked among the top five countries of origin.[19] The border closures on both continents that accompanied the pandemic have slowed the migration movement towards Europe. But with border openings resuming, migrants from Nigeria are likely to seek entry to the EU again soon, and then probably in even greater numbers.

Many Nigerians are now looking to the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023 with dampened hopes. Will they possibly produce a government that can spark a spirit of optimism? The chances of that are slim. The battles between the Diadochi have long since begun among the established functional elites in both major parties, from which the candidates will emerge. Smaller parties, on the other hand, are not expected to succeed in the elections, since they will lack the requisite resources to win elections in Nigeria.

The potential for violence will not diminish, but rather increase as poverty and population size grow.

So, the big question remains about the medium- to long-term prospects for young people in Nigeria. These do not look good; the economic growth that creates jobs is not expected any time soon. For far too long, governments have relied on the job-poor but long-lucrative oil industry, and have failed to diversify the economy. In the meantime, the international oil market is weakening, and the Nigerian state's revenues have fallen sharply. To make matters worse, the country's population is growing rapidly due to a high birth rate. The UN predicted years ago that Nigeria will have over 400 million people by 2050. By then, the country is expected to overtake the US, and have the third largest population worldwide behind China and India. To keep up with this development, the country's economy would have to show double-digit growth figures.

The EndSARS protests may have foreshadowed what the country has to brace itself for. After

the shooting in Lagos, a state of emergency prevailed across the country. Large gatherings of young men engaged in looting and vandalism, and threatened the lives of others. The police were overwhelmed and the army had to be called out. This potential for violence and destruction will not diminish, but rather increase as poverty and population size grow. Social unrest might then break out at given moments in waves, and at ever shorter intervals. However, the EndSARS protests, which took place almost exclusively in the Christian south of the country, have also shown one thing. It is unlikely that a large, nationwide youth

Remembering the violence: Young people take to the streets again one year after the EndSARS protests against police brutality, which were brought to a bloody end by the government. Source: © Afolabi Sotunde, Reuters.

movement will emerge to rebel against the existing power relations. The youth in Nigeria is too ethnically, religiously, and socially divided for that. Many of the approximately 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria do not live peacefully with each other. The distrust between Christians and Muslims, who each make up about 50 per cent of the population and divide the country into the north and south, is rather high on both sides. And the young, internet-savvy, well-educated segment of the population in Lagos that organised the peaceful EndSARS protests is a small minority among young people in Nigeria. The vast majority of them are less well educated, and live in poverty.

– translated from German –

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Source: © Sergio Moraes, Reuters.

Has the "Neither-Nor" Generation Reached a Dead End?

The Effects of Social Inequality and the COVID-19 Pandemic on Brazilian Youth

Luiz Gustavo Carlos / Kevin Oswald

All areas of Brazilian society were hit hard by the pandemic. Increasing unemployment, declining education, and the absence of adequate state measures have put the country in a precarious situation that reveals the structural problem of inequality and causes frustration and fear about the future, especially among the younger generation.

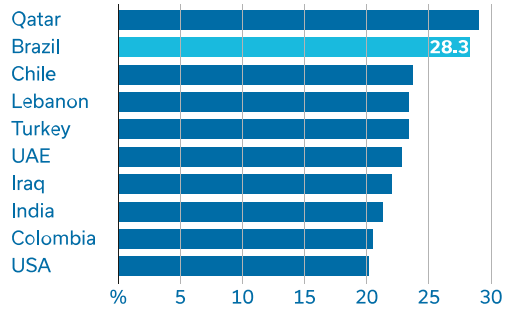
Geração nem-nem (the "neither-nor" generation) is a term used in Brazil to refer to young people aged between 15 and 29 who are neither integrated into the labour market nor attend an educational institution such as school or university. The percentage of young people in this situation increased greatly in the early 2010s, reaching a peak of almost 30 per cent in the second half of 2020.[1] This is all the more worrying because young adults in this age group in Brazil currently represent 50 million, almost one quarter of the population of the largest Latin American country.[2]

Although these numbers increased over the course of the devastating COVID crisis, as they did in other emerging and developing countries, it is certain that, in Brazil, this phenomenon is generally associated with specific and long-standing factors such as more difficult conditions for accessing education and the labour market.

Brazil has continental dimensions and is home to 213 million people.[3] It also has impressive natural resources. In the past, these three characteristics have been decisive for the country's uneven economic development. The strong emphasis on exporting agricultural products promoted rural development, and large spaces were approved for agricultural production, while industrial production tended to be relegated to the background and produced a small number of technologically complex products, exacerbating the concentration of income. This basic economic orientation has been responsible for structural inequality for decades, since it concentrates income among a relatively small group of elites. The Brazilian government (so far) has thus been unable to distribute income more evenly among the population, leading to a number of structural problems in such areas as educational opportunities, health, living space, and basic sanitation.

According to 2019 data from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Brazil has the second highest concentration of income after Qatar.[4]

Fig. 1: Income Concentration among the Richest One Per Cent of the Population in Various Countries



Source: own illustration based on Sasse 2021, n. 5.

Figure 1 shows that the highest earning one per cent earn more than one quarter (28.3 per cent) of the country's income. Looking at the highest earning ten per cent of the population, they earn 41.9 per cent of the country's income according to the same UNDP data. Conversely, this means that the remaining 90 per cent of the Brazilian population earn less than 60 per cent of the total income in the form of wages – a clear sign of income concentration and therefore of extreme socioeconomic inequality in the country.[5] Another important indication of Brazil's social

structure is its Gini index of 0.539 based on estimations made in 2018. This index, developed by the World Bank,[6] ranges between 0 and 1. The closer it is to 0 (complete equality), the less inequality there is in the country; the closer to 1 (complete inequality), the greater the inequality.[7] Based on this indicator, Brazil also ranks as one of the ten countries with the greatest inequality worldwide.[8]

Between 2003 and 2010, Brazil attempted to use its positive macroeconomic situation resulting from the raw materials boom and associated record export earnings to engage in social redistribution. The earnings were invested in social programmes and public social policies, leading to a significant increase in the Human Development Index (HDI). In particular, access to the public health system improved, and various initiatives were launched for advancing the urbanisation process. At the same time, infant mortality fell and life expectancy grew.[9]

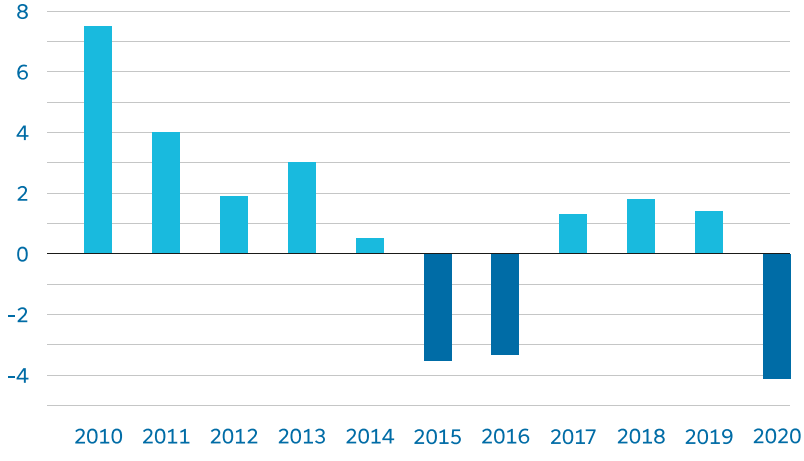
This positive trajectory began to reverse in 2013, when Brazil was shaken by a series of political protests and mass demonstrations, which, in retrospect, can be viewed as harbingers of economic and political upheaval.[10] Another important element affecting the political and economic landscape in 2014 was Operação Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash)[11], which exposed – sometimes in a contradictory and legally questionable manner – cases of corruption involving a number of prominent politicians and businesspeople. These political shocks persisted until the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and triggered a deep institutional crisis that extended to almost all areas of society. Brazilian investment security also steadily declined, the smouldering economic and political crisis deepened, and a severe rift in Brazilian society gave rise to a dangerous polarisation throughout the country.

The Brazilian gross domestic product (GDP) reflects the political and economic development described here. In 2013, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) was still able to observe a significant increase compared to the previous year, but the rise did not continue in the following years. The Brazilian economy shrank by more than three per cent in 2015 and again in 2016. The GDP for 2020 is also important, since it demonstrates the impact of the pandemic in Brazil.

Income Inequality and Declining Education Constitute Structural Problems for Brazilian Youth

The above-mentioned period of political upheaval had direct repercussions on the entire

Fig. 2: Annual Rates of Change in Brazilian GDP in Per Cent



Source: own illustration based on IBGE 2021, n. 21, p. 17.

structure of Brazilian society, with adolescents and young adults bearing the brunt of setbacks. Young people are hit especially hard by unemployment, and saw their incomes fall four times more than the average for other demographic groups due to the COVID crisis.[12] According to a socio-political study conducted by the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV Social)[13], which examines social inequality for individual earned income based on the Gini index, the index value rose from 2014 to the second half of 2019. This is an indication of a progressively increasing inequality. In 2019, income inequality among young people (15 to 29) was 41.2 per cent higher than among the overall population[14], underscoring the necessity of special political measures for this group.

There is a surplus of young people with similar profiles on the labour market.

Opportunities for access to high-quality education in Brazil are still largely reserved for those with sufficient financial resources to either pay for a private university, or to establish the best possible conditions for acceptance into a prestigious public university. By international standards, Brazil enjoys a high number of publicly accessible educational institutions offering children and young people free, comprehensive education. However, the problem is that the quality of these institutions is significantly lower than private, fee-paying ones. The Brazilian educational system presents a unique feature with respect to admission to higher education: to enter the country's universities, students must take a national university examination (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio, ENEM) for most public universities and the best private ones. This test serves not only to establish the level of education for secondary school students[15] for a national comparison, but also to classify them in a ranked list used for admission to public universities and scholarships to private ones.[16] The ENEM represents another important yardstick for the state of public education policy, since millions of students sit it. The disparity between private and public educational institutions in primary and secondary education is highlighted time and again in the assessment of ENEM results and admissions to the best universities. The reason behind this is that those who had better (which overwhelmingly means private) primary and secondary education have greater chances of securing a place in the country's best public and private universities. Scientific surveys show that the higher the annual tuition fee, the higher the average ENEM point total of the exam taker.[17]

Besides the unequal opportunities for admission to university education associated with this, ENEM results also have far-reaching effects on access to the first job, since many public school graduates who are refused university admission have little chance in the highly competitive labour market. This is because they have limited or no practical work experience and, as has been pointed out, their education is of lower quality than that of graduates of private educational institutions. Given the surplus of young people with a similar profile on the labour market and demand for labour that has not risen to the same extent, companies are naturally beginning to choose the best educated from the large pool of applicants. For those who only had an average public education, perhaps because their parents earned too little, the cards are stacked against them in the competition for spots in universities or for practical professional training. That means young people are often ruled out from the labour market and from higher education at one stroke before they reach 18 years.

The fact that the current government under right-wing populist President Jair Bolsonaro places little value on educational policy exacerbates these problems. In 2021, the Ministry of Education's budget was reduced by 2.7 billion reals. The official reason for this reduction is general austerity measures affecting all ministries. Yet, it is striking that the Ministry of the Economy's budget was reduced by only 1.4 billion reals, more than one billion less than the

Academic and social selection: Students gather for the ENEM university entrance examination. Studies show that students from expensive private schools tend to do significantly better. Source: © Amanda Perobelli Reuters.

reduction to Education.[18] Moreover, since Bolsonaro took office in January 2019, the Ministry of Education has been one of the ministries blighted by the most controversies, and changes of minister occurred with astonishing frequency. What is more, criteria for the suitability of the education minister appear to be not so much expertise in the relevant field, as agreement with the President's ideological orientation.

For instance, Milton Ribeiro, the current Minister of Education, said in a speech that "the university should in fact only be for a few".[19] This statement, clearly intended to deny higher education to underprivileged groups and prevent diversification of the student body, is in line with the current government's position. Verbal attacks by the government on universities and academia in general are no rarity under Bolsonaro, and the catastrophic crisis management during the pandemic clearly showed that policy recommendations founded on science are not valued; instead, life is being made increasingly difficult for critical academics and scientists by means of funding cuts and fake news.

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Labour Market and the Educational System

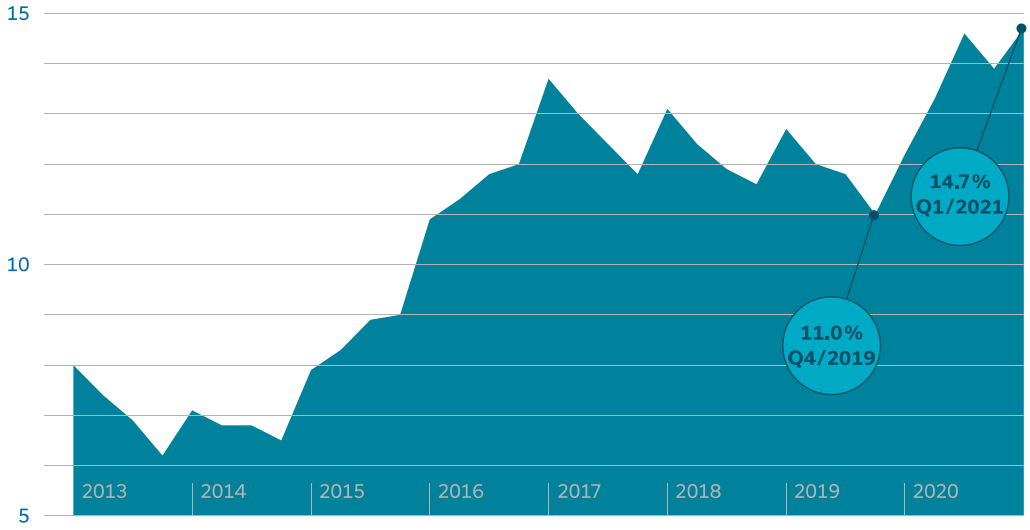
The global pandemic is exacerbating structural problems in a plethora of countries, since many economies have been virtually brought to a standstill by the necessity of social isolation. In Brazil, the pandemic directly affected the number of young people aged between 15 and 29 who neither work nor participate in any form of education or training programmes. The

pandemic inflated the figures by about three percentage points, and the percentage of those in the "neither-nor" generation increased to the record of 29.33 per cent alluded to at the beginning of this article.[20] This can largely be ascribed to the recession caused by COVID-19 (see fig. 2). During the crisis year of 2020, the Brazilian economy slumped by 4.1 per cent[21], with massive layoffs primarily from the services sector such as tourism and the hotel and catering industry, which was in a months-long lockdown, disproportionately affecting young people.

In Brazil, private educational institutions managed to improvise relatively quickly in the first months of 2020, and to change mechanisms such that lesson plans could be adapted and virtual teaching and homework implemented to ensure the orderly completion of the 2020 school year. Public schools, on the other hand, had to make much deeper cuts in their curricula, since the vast majority of their students were among the less privileged classes and often had no access to an internet-compatible end device: a prerequisite for following remote teaching. This illustrated the problem of digital inequality.

Pictures of former President Lula da Silva (left) and Head of State Jair Bolsonaro at a demonstration in São Paulo: Neither the previous governments of the workers' party nor the current right-wing populist government have developed sustainable solutions in education and social policy.
Source: © Amanda Perobelli, Reuters.

Fig. 3: Unemployment Rate in Brazil in Per Cent



Source: own illustration based on IBGE 2021: Biblioteca. PNAD contínua trimestral, ID 2421, in: https://bit.ly/3Ccqgxc [11 Nov 2021].

Besides the fact that access to digital media was unequally distributed among the population because of income inequality, digital competence also varies widely, as it is primarily the least privileged young people who have no access to stable internet, not to mention teaching in fundamental technical issues and skills. The impossibility of guaranteeing all students equal access to the internet and technical tools constituted one of the reasons for increased drop-out rates, which, in turn, is another major cause of the significant rise in those belonging to the "neither-nor" generation in the wake of the pandemic.[22]

Another exacerbating factor is the unemployment rate. It has seen an almost continual increase since 2012, stabilising between 2017 and 2019, and skyrocketing again in 2020 because of the COVID crisis and subsequent global economic collapse, greatly worsening the situation for the "neither-nor" generation. Figure 3 shows the increase in unemployment from the first half of 2020 until its peak in 2021.

According to a study by FGV Social, the unemployment rate for the group of young people aged between 15 and 29 rose from 49.4 per cent to 56.3 per cent as a result of the pandemic.[23] The rise in unemployment, the number of school drop-outs, and the difficulties in attending virtual teaching put millions of young people in Brazil in a position in which they can neither work nor receive an education.

Conclusion

Brazil was hit hard by the pandemic and has great difficulties in coping with economic and social problems that already existed prior to COVID-19. This is largely due to political instability and governmental incompetence. COVID emergency assistance (Auxílio Emergencial)[24] was one of the few effective governmental measures whose aim was to prevent complete economic collapse, mass poverty, and an extreme rise in social inequality. Since a large swathe of the Brazilian population work in the informal sector and were suddenly deprived of jobs when the pandemic hit, this important measure had positive effects and supported millions of families.

At the same time, the situation for youth in Brazil is dramatic. Despite the phenomenon of the

"neither-nor" generation having been present before the current pandemic-driven crisis, its effects on young people aged between 15 and 29 who are suffering from unemployment, a lack of equal opportunities, and insufficient access to education, are especially devastating.

Notwithstanding investments in social and educational policy that had a positive impact on the lives of young Brazilians, the governments led by the left-wing workers' party, Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), made a series of errors between 2003 and 2016. The primary problem was the inability to develop a solid strategy for sustainable equality of opportunity and affordable educational and social policy that is neither subject to the whims of interest groups nor to economic fluctuations. The raw materials boom and Brazil's economic upswing facilitated the implementation of many promising social and educational measures. For instance, the "University for All" (Universidade para todos, ProUni) programme of 2006 was focused on state financing of scholarships to private universities for students from poor families. By expanding the fund for financing university students (Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil, FIES), the state assumed the costs of education, which could be repaid upon graduation. However, all these innovations failed in long-term planning and in deeply anchoring the programmes into Brazilian legislation. When raw materials prices began to fall (in particular from 2010 as the second Lula government transitioned to the first Dilma Rousseff government), this policy area quickly lost importance again due to conflicts of interest and unfavourable economic developments. When the crisis deepened in 2016 and Dilma Rousseff was impeached, many of the measures were gradually hollowed out or not extended because of their cost. The opportunity was also missed not only to improve access to higher education, but also to adopt measures to facilitate integration of young people into the labour market and to fund non-academic, practical training models.

Nor does the current government seem willing to address problems of the younger generation, and instead attempts to subject educational policy to ideology. The will for international cooperation in the areas of education, science, and technology is not particularly strong in the Bolsonaro government. Policies addressing the particularly vulnerable population group of 15 to 29-year-olds with special offers would be all the more important, since the dilemma of the "neither-nor" generation described here is without doubt an issue of serious macrosocial and economic significance. At the same time, those affected find themselves in a decisive development stage between adolescence and adulthood. If no political measures based on scientific data and real needs are implemented for this section of the population, the problem will simply be shifted to the future – and what is now the "neither-nor" generation could become a lost generation. This is thus an issue that should be debated in the presidential campaign that is already kicking off, and a constructive competition of ideas should ensue. Brazil, the "Land of the Future", should offer its youth neither insufficient educational opportunities nor hopelessness in their search for a job and provide its *nem-nems* a way out of this dead end as quickly as possible.

– translated from German –

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Source: © Gonzalo Fuentes, Reuters.

under discussion

No Longer on the Sidelines? Youth and Politics

Fuel for the European Engine

What Does the Franco-German Partnership Mean for Young People on Both Sides of the Rhine?

An Interview with Hugo Leclerc and Jannis Stöter

In spring 2021, Hugo Leclerc and Jannis Stöter, along with a group of students, founded the Franco-German think tank La DenkFabrik. The two students spoke to us about the young generation's view of the Franco-German partnership and European integration – and revealed to us what they associate with Konrad Adenauer.

Ai: *Mr Leclerc, Mr Stöter, what first comes to mind when you think of Franco-German relations?*

Hugo Leclerc: I immediately think of my grandfather, whose brother was deported to Auschwitz during the Second World War. My grandfather spent his whole life keeping the memory of this terrible time alive, and he coordinated a memorial group in Caen for relatives of deportees. And he was strongly committed to reconciliation and building links between France and Germany. I'm sure he also would have been proud of my commitment to this.

Jannis Stöter: My personal view of Franco-German relations is not as strongly characterised by family history. My parents grew up in former East Germany, so there was no opportunity to get to know France more closely through an exchange programme or travel. I was the first to be able to add a chapter to our family history that deals more intensively with our neighbour in the West.

My perspective on Franco-German relations is characterised by my personal experience. In tenth grade, I spent three months in La Rochelle on a student exchange programme. That was my first time in France. Back then, I still had little grasp of the historic magnitude of Franco-German relations, but I quickly became aware of it when I was there.

Ai: *You both studied law in a Franco-German programme in Cologne, which is where you met. And you then founded a think tank together – DenkFabrik – which deals with Franco-German relations. Why did you decide to do that?*

Stöter: Both of us, or rather the group that founded the think tank, wanted to help shape in practice what we deal with in theory during our studies. We set up DenkFabrik so that we could get involved in the Franco-German dynamic. We want to make ideas heard, bring together young people from France and Germany and inspire them to get involved in Franco-German relations.

Ai: *How does that look exactly?*

Leclerc: We organise events and projects which bring together young people from both countries. It's not only about politics, but also about other topics, such as social issues and culture. We are also working on a project which will bring young people into contact with

heads of companies, researchers, and authors from France and Germany. We want to connect people and help them engage in dialogue. On top of that, students also get involved with DenkFabrik by writing articles and analyses on current topics.

Ai: *In your opinion, how do you think young people see relations between the two countries? Are teenagers and young adults aware of the special nature and conflict-ridden history of Franco-German relations – or does that rather play a minor role?*

Leclerc: Yes, the history is still alive, and it still plays a role for our generation. In France, we learn about this topic in history class. But its role today is different to what it was immediately after the war, of course. What distinguishes the Franco-German relationship today goes beyond remembering the past, but is also deeper than simple terms like friendship.

Stöter: If I think back to where my first image of France was formed, I certainly remember my French class. It was a romanticised image of France; with beautiful places like Paris. And it was the same image that made me want to explore France. However, as I have already mentioned, once I was there I really became aware of the bloody side of our joint history for the first time. It was mainly through contact with the older generation that I realised that wounds from the war are still there today. For my generation, however, the awareness of a common European identity, and the opportunity to work together in a united Europe appears to be in the foreground. The high demand for exchange programmes, for example, shows that the relationship between the two countries is now on quite a solid footing.

Ai: *Exchange programmes and other contacts between young people from Germany and France have been severely limited because of the pandemic. And other things taken for granted within Europe, such as open borders, were suddenly no longer a given. How do you view Europe's handling of the coronavirus crisis? And what does this period mean for young people?*

Stöter: We saw that the coronavirus pandemic initially led to more protectionism, but also to more solidarity. For example, in the face of overcrowded intensive care units, patients were flown from France to Germany and treated there. Furthermore, it was through a joint initiative of France and Germany in particular that a comprehensive European reconstruction fund could be set up.

And below the political level, positive ideas and developments have certainly emerged from the crisis. There's a new willingness to build relationships and networks, for example through Zoom and social networks. We didn't use these opportunities to this extent before. For example, as a think tank, we engaged in conversations with city officials and politicians on both sides of the Rhine. We organised them from our living rooms, so to say.

Ai: *So, in a way, the pandemic has also opened up new opportunities for you – despite all the downsides.*

Stöter: Exactly. Who knows how long it would have taken otherwise for us as a young think tank to come into contact with these people? However, although Zoom opens up new paths, it's clear that it in no way replaces direct interpersonal contact. I see restricted mobility as a silent threat to European integration.

Ai: *What do you mean by that?*

Stöter: Many projects that are designed to help young people explore Europe have unrestricted mobility as their prerequisite, be it a school exchange, the European Youth Parliament, an internship, a semester abroad, or simply an Interrail trip. For many, these opportunities had become inaccessible as a direct result of the pandemic. The really sad thing is that the opportunity to gain such experiences, and to link them to Europe, doesn't come back so easily in many cases because of the passage of time. To me, it is even more serious that the pandemic has shaken the basic trust in unrestricted mobility within Europe to a certain extent, as well as the trust in being able to take part in an Erasmus programme, if desired. This image of closed borders and unfulfilled promises mustn't be allowed to become fortified in the minds of young people.

Ai: *Germany and France are sometimes described as "the engine of Europe". Is this engine currently running smoothly or is it faltering?*

Leclerc: I believe that what France and Germany are doing together is an example of the power of compromise. This has also been shown in the management of the coronavirus pandemic – in the reconstruction fund. We don't always agree, but we find compromises through dialogue. And that's precisely the strength of the relationship. However, the term "engine of Europe" is sometimes misinterpreted as meaning that France and Germany lead the way in Europe, and forget about other countries. I would say, rather, that the Franco-German pair is more fuel than engine. When it works, the European engine works.

Ai: *Where do you see the greatest weaknesses and potential for tension in Franco-German relations? Or in other words, what's not going well between the two partners?*

Leclerc: There's a danger of France and Germany talking at cross purposes on important decisions. It's said that, in his first years of office, President Macron made many calls to Berlin that went unanswered. However, when it came to adopting the economic stimulus package, the two countries were in agreement and took a big step forward. As with any relationship, they must beware of misunderstandings that could divide them. My personal concern is that the next few months have especially high potential for such misunderstandings.

***Ai:** In what way?*

Leclerc: One example is the French EU Council presidency, which will begin in January 2022. For some days now, we have been hearing about the impatience and anticipation of some French politicians who hope that Germany will come to the table with a new government, and thus with a real will to act. If not, there would be a risk of France making a move on its own without waiting for Germany. This is all the more true given the importance of the French EU presidency for Macron a few months before the presidential elections. Another point of tension is the deficit rule. It's possible that Germany will return to a stricter position on the European rule on exceeding deficit limits, which France no longer wants. This would be a major difference of opinion on economic policy that would also lead to frustration.

Stöter: As Hugo already said, under Angela Merkel's coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), Germany had a rather hesitant attitude towards France's integration proposals. The formulation of a clear stance towards the further development of the EU will therefore become even more important for the new German government. At the same time, it must show a willingness to compromise on contentious issues, such as the deficit rule for example. With a view to the upcoming French Council Presidency, a fast-acting government would be desirable – not for the purpose of supporting Mr Macron in his election campaign, but to send a signal that the Franco-German fuel for Europe is working, and that the two countries have a common will to shape the future. At the same time, however, elections in France are coming up in April. That could slow down the process again – or give the new German government the opportunity to sharpen its position and show initiative itself.

***Ai:** A few months ago, a debate was ignited between French president Emmanuel Macron and then German defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer over the idea of "strategic autonomy for Europe". Kramp-Karrenbauer at the time emphasised the central role of the United States for Europe's security, and called Europe's strategic autonomy in this context an "illusion". Macron meanwhile demanded more European autonomy, and labelled Kramp-Karrenbauer's assessment a "misinterpretation of history". How did you follow this debate?*

Leclerc: In France, the discussion was quite controversial. Some saw it as a sign that the two countries have very different ideas. From my point of view, the debate was too personal, but I think it is a debate we have to have.

Stöter: The debate you referenced is also a topic of discussion at DenkFabrik because it raises crucial questions for the future of Europe. How should the European Union position itself in the future in the geopolitical conflict between the US and China? What role does the EU want to play in this context? These questions must be asked and go hand in hand with other questions, such as that of a European army.

Ai: *And where do you stand on the content of the debate? Does Europe need more autonomy? And what does that mean for relations with the US and China?*

Stöter: In my view, Europe must become more strategically autonomous. It's important to take on a proactive role and to show initiative. This is not about competing with the US. When it comes to human rights, for example, Europe is of course much closer to the US than it is to China.

Leclerc: There are issues where we need more independent European positions. Strategies need to be developed, and more sovereignty and European strength are needed.

Bringing Paris and Berlin closer together: This is one of the goals Hugo Leclerc (right) and Jannis Stöter have set themselves in founding the Franco-German think tank La DenkFabrik. Source: © Louisa Heuss, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Ai: *Recently, there was a deep diplomatic crisis between Paris and Washington after a submarine deal agreed between France and Australia fell through, and the Australians opted to acquire nuclear submarines in cooperation with the US and the UK instead. France even withdrew its ambassadors from the US and Australia in this context. And in the course of the Afghanistan withdrawal, there was also criticism of the US, which was accused of inadequate coordination with its allies. Do these developments also speak for more European autonomy and a new positioning vis-à-vis the US?*

Stöter: For me, the debate was not about the actual business at all, but rather about the trilateral security pact agreed between the US, Australia, and the UK. The symbolism emanating from it looks like a unification of the Anglophone world to the exclusion of the EU,

especially since the agreed partnership also extends to other future issues involving artificial intelligence, quantum technology, and cyber defence. If the pact shows one thing then in this context it would be that Europe also needs to do its homework and make its own contribution. The pact makes this task even clearer. However, it would be a missed opportunity and also a wrong symbol not to advance these developments in partnership with other democratic countries. NATO should provide ample opportunity for this.

Leclerc: I know that Germany is not very fond of the side of France that tends to make a lot of noise about some little detail. But I believe this is about much more than just a lost contract. It's about our positioning at the core of the alliances, as well as the geopolitical perception of France and the EU. France's completion of the contract would also have been a positive flagship for the EU. This is why it's even more regrettable that the contract has now gone to the US. Of course, the same would have been true if it had been a large German arms contract instead.

Ai: How do you view the concept of a European army?

Leclerc: A European army could lead to more autonomy. However, it remains questionable what exactly is meant by this. The question also touches on aspects of national sovereignty. In France, we are strongly attached to our army.

Stöter: The question of a European army is inseparably linked to the question of its competences and duties. To me, the debate seems to be particularly relevant in the context of defending joint European infrastructure, such as the European satellite navigation system Galileo, and will become even more crucial in the future in the field of cyber defence. Furthermore, especially regarding your previous question on the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the coordination of national forces in the planning of joint operations should be accelerated. However, this does not require a European army as such.

Ai: The discussion about a European army is one about further steps towards integration. However, there are now political personalities, movements, and parties in both Germany and France who not only want to prevent further steps towards integration, but who are also questioning the entire construct of European integration. How does your generation view such positions?

Stöter: Many young people in our environment take the basic European freedoms for granted. We grew up that way, we didn't know anything else, and that's great for us. But this perception can also be deceptive. These freedoms are mostly taken for granted by those who had the chance to enjoy them at an early age. Others, who did not have the opportunity in this way, may tend to see the EU as an

How do they make their voices heard? Young people in front of the European Parliament building in Brussels. According to Hugo Leclerc, young people are still too often on the sidelines of European decision-making processes. Source: © Yves Herman, Reuters.

opaque institution that does not benefit them. This is dangerous, as it can lead to indifference towards Europe.

Leclerc: We shouldn't forget that young people themselves are also part of the populist dynamic in some areas. There is this concept of retreating inwards nationally. We have to show that this is neither something to strive towards, and nor is it realistic. That is also what we want to achieve with DenkFabrik. In doing so, it's important to promote Europe in a tangible way, and not just along the lines of "Europe is good and that's why you have to continue developing it". For us, it's important that young people have tangible experiences and that they can also contribute their own ideas to discussions.

Stöter: Our aim is to bring people together, but also to tell stories of people who are active in the Franco-German or European context. For example, we want to inform people about what it means to study in a Franco-German programme, and what opportunities and challenges there are. It's important to give the opportunity to experience Europe to those who have perhaps had less contact with it and are somewhat sceptical.

Ai: *What are the most frequent criticisms you hear from young people about the European Union? And where specifically do you see the weaknesses of the EU?*

Leclerc: This is a topic we would like to address in a new project. In very concrete terms, however, I can say that Europe must not remain as just a feeling or an idea. It's not difficult to be pro-Europe but what does that mean specifically? There are too few answers to this question. It's easy to say that you're pro-Europe without having any specific idea or ambition behind it. Maybe the fact that we see a ton of things that still need to be done prevents us from seeing anything specific. Still, I believe that, step by step and with real ambition, we can shape a different Europe that will have more support because it's tangible, efficient, and close to everyone.

Stöter: The question that arises for me, as it does for Hugo, when I think about the EU is that of a specific common vision. The political process often sends different signals on this, and it sometimes seems like a policy of the lowest common denominator. I think the EU's self-image needs to be clarified so that it can develop further and become more tangible for young people. At the same time, young people also need to be more involved in the European process. After all, it's about their European future, which they must also be able to help shape.

Ai: *What do you think is needed at the political level to convince young people more about Europe?*

Stöter: I don't think we need to convince the vast majority of young people about Europe and its beauty. At least that's my perception. When it comes to what specifically needs to be done, I think two issues are particularly significant. Firstly, there's the issue of sustainability, which is being tackled through the European Green Deal, and which addresses the question of how the future should be shaped. In this context, it's crucial – and this is the second major topic – that young people are involved. It's important to

facilitate forms of active involvement in Europe. If I can help to shape something, then I also have a more personal connection to it.

Leclerc: Young people are still often too sidelined in decision-making processes. There are many initiatives, but they are all too often organised in a top-down fashion. Active involvement is also a key issue for me. And that's what DenkFabrik is about.

Stöter: I might add that in order to shape things together, mobility is required. When it's easy to go to another country and meet people there, you also come up with new ideas. It's also important to simplify structures. As we have seen ourselves with La DenkFabrik, setting up an association is a lot of work. And it's not possible to do it at the European level so we had to decide between Germany and France. So, for practical reasons, we chose Germany.

Leclerc: So, I'm now a French chairman of a German association. That's cool (laughs).

Ai: *One last question to wrap up our interview: In a few words, what do you associate Konrad Adenauer with?*

Leclerc: Mayor of Cologne.

Stöter: And, of course, that he took the first steps after the Second World War and rebuilt relations with the West, and France in particular. That's what I associate him with. And that's a great legacy.

The interview was conducted by Sören Soika and Fabian Wagener – translated from German.

Hugo Leclerc (21) was born and raised in Paris. He moved to Germany for the first time to study Franco-German law at the University of Cologne and the Sorbonne in Paris. During his three years in Cologne, he founded La DenkFabrik. Today, he is the president of the association and steers its further development.

Jannis Stöter (24) started his legal studies in Cologne, but later decided to continue his studies at the Humboldt-University of Berlin. He also graduated from Duke University in December 2021 with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. He grew up near Schwerin in northeast Germany. As a co-founder and member of the board at La DenkFabrik, he is responsible for the think thank's strategic development in Germany.

Source: © Fabrizio Bensch, Reuters.

Interjection

Other Topics

Doing What You Believe Is Right

Germany's New Federal Government Must Close the Gap between Ambition and Reality in Foreign Affairs

Frank Priess

The end of an era – that, at least, is how Angela Merkel's 16-year tenure as German chancellor is currently being described in many international accolades – presents an opportunity for sober review. Are Germany and Europe better off now than they were in 2005? Is their influence greater? Do they have more freedom to manoeuvre? In a changed world, is their model robust, or, to use an English word newly popular in German, is it "resilient"? What about the two traditional pillars of German foreign policy, namely the European Union and transatlantic relations? How much weight does the "West" carry in the world? Answers to these questions point toward the challenges that will confront Germany's new federal government, particularly with regard to foreign affairs.

A critical investigation into these questions does not aim to blame specific persons for the way in which the many crises of the era were handled – the banking and economic crisis that began in the US, the sovereign debt crisis, the Euro crisis, the refugee crisis, COVID-19. It is fair to speak of a good 16 years for Germany while still asking whether the country is well-equipped for future challenges. The era began with America's attempt at "nation building abroad" under the George W. Bush administration – which was justifiably criticised in Germany, even at the time. It ends with a new superpower rivalry involving the rising colossus of China, a United States rattled after four years of Donald Trump and now engaged in the arduous effort to regain trust, as well as a strained European Union, whose lack of impact can be felt even in its own backyard and which is becoming a less significant actor on the global stage.

Over the coming years, one of the first key tasks of German foreign and security policies will be to close the enormous gap between ambition and reality. Or even better: to support the same at the level of the European Union. A moral world power lacking the will and capabilities to play power politics puts itself in danger of becoming a global laughing stock that need not be taken seriously. And our problem here is not a lack of analyses or clever strategy papers.

German foreign policy – and that of the EU – has been very successful when formulating big ambitions. We aspire to be a player on the global stage, to assume more responsibility – as formulated by the Foreign Minister and Federal President several years ago. And the reality? Germany and the EU had to look on helplessly as they were presented with a fait accompli on numerous occasions. Russia annexed the Crimea in violation of international law, destabilised the Ukraine and expanded its own sphere of influence through frozen conflicts. In our immediate vicinity, Syria sank into the chaos of war and Libya became a failed state, while in both countries powers like Turkey and Russia used military force to create facts on the ground. Meanwhile, the European Union tried to cope with the influx of refugees and convince itself that the time would come when it would be needed for rebuilding. Even the actions of autocratically ruled medium-sized states in our own backyard have failed to elicit a response, such as when the dictator of Belarus decided to transport Iraqi refugees to the country's border with Lithuania and Poland. China and the US are currently embroiled in a new superpower confrontation, and Europeans must be careful not to

Russia's president Vladimir Putin depicted on a mural on the annexed Crimean peninsula: In recent years, Germany and Europe frequently had to look on helplessly as in their neighbouring countries third parties created political and military facts on the ground. Source: © Pavel Rebrov, Reuters.

end up in the crossfire, becoming the victim of extraterritorial sanctions from both sides rather than having their own, independent role to play. Nevertheless, the desire for more "strategic sovereignty" has not been followed up with much action: in terms of security policy, Germany remains totally dependent on the US, whose interests are by no means always congruent with those of Europeans, and is falling behind technologically. The inglorious end of 20 years of engagement in Afghanistan has once again illustrated the scope of these problems, fuelling the narrative that "the West" is in retreat, despite all rhetoric to the contrary.

The German Public Remains Reluctant

In a first, the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) placed a detailed foreign and security policy at the top of its campaign platform; issues it raised there, however, played no role in the election itself. That, too, is part of the problem. For years, relevant polls have shown that its citizens want Germany to be involved in international affairs, but their eagerness wanes as demands beyond humanitarian aid become more concrete and robust. Intervention in Afghanistan could not be justified militarily, after all – it instead had to be couched in terms of developmental policy that promoted education for girls. Perceived threats? From Russia or China? These do not generally resonate with the public. That, of course, makes it difficult to appropriately increase the defence budget or to press Germany to fulfil its commitments within NATO. Common defence projects in Europe aimed at maintaining – or even simply developing – our own technological capabilities? Sure, but not for export if you don't mind; this attitude makes Germany an unattractive partner for others. A European army? Maybe, but probably more as an appealing vision to distract us from the bleak reality of what our armed forces and long-established common "Battlegroups" cannot do and, most importantly, should not do. While others create facts on the ground with only modest effort and risk, the question of whether to arm drones threatens the viability of a governing coalition here. And it is unlikely to be any easier for new coalitions.

All we have left to leverage is economic might. Yet that power looks increasingly fragile: competitiveness is not exactly increasing, the pressure of demographic problems is growing, and costs are spiralling out of control, in part as a consequence of ideologically motivated climate decisions. And by rejecting free trade – not even our agreement with Canada has been ratified, one with MERCOSUR is on rocky ground, and a deal with the US is hardly on the cards right now – we hamper our ability to stabilise important markets and to influence the development of norms and standards. All the while, other players are much more skilled at translating their economic influence into political leverage; simply look at China's involvement in Africa and Latin America, continents where Europe actually has a head start. Yet if our economic model has lost its former glory, successfully promoting our values will become increasingly difficult. The rising popularity of more authoritarian models is clear to see in the United Nations and in the decisions made by the UN Human Rights Council.

> **If we want to have a voice in the global concert, then no European nation state can go it alone.**

Tackling these shortcomings does not mean starting from scratch. A myriad of strategies and priorities have already been formulated – and even sound banal to some. The key issue once again: implementation deficit.

The European Union Remains Our Foundation

Of course, we need a strong European Union capable of action and that must be the focus of every German government. If we want to have a voice in the global concert in future – a voice that is heard – then no European nation state can go it alone. This will require patching the cracks, preventing fractures from becoming any deeper, and reconciling the agendas of East Central, Western and Southern Europe. It will mean ensuring robust German commitment to the security interests of the Baltic States and Poland, and taking on NATO burdens that the US is now less willing to bear – albeit there remains no substitute for the US nuclear umbrella. In Southern and Southeast Europe, it is not least about finding answers to the immigration pressures facing these countries in particular, both by land and sea routes – while this issue has retreated from the headlines somewhat, it has lost none of its weight.

For Germany, this traditionally means actively assuming the role of mediator, rather than being perceived as taking sides. It will nevertheless require structural reforms: the principle of consensus gives veto power to individual countries with all of their special interests, compromising the EU's ability to act, and giving external actors massive opportunities to exercise influence, as well as making all other parties susceptible to blackmail. The alternative is "coalitions of the willing" that boldly lead the way. We will need attractive common projects in all areas from which no one will wish to feel excluded. Here, key technologies and data worlds are crucial fields, especially given that this is where Europe is most at risk of becoming less competitive and being left behind by the rest of the world.

A Look at Our Neighbours

Secondly, the new government will have to focus on having stable neighbours to our east and south, as this is in Germany's and Europe's most direct interests. Our interest in Western Balkan States and in Ukraine could certainly manifest itself in a more active way; our tepid involvement with Georgia and the southern Caucasus region could use an upgrade, too. This is no easy undertaking in light of the well-known differences in interest within the EU, but one in which Germany must play a leadership role.

Offers of economic integration to states south of the Mediterranean still fall far short of what would be needed, what is expected and what is in our interests. Key here are prospects for the younger generation in terms of qualification and job creation – no one wants to risk further destabilisation and radicalisation, the ramifications of which would directly impact Europe. The same holds, but even more so, for the powder keg of the Middle East, with its dangerous competition between regional powers, the instability even in what had been "model countries" like Lebanon, the risk of nuclear proliferation and, not least, the unresolved problem of Islamist-motivated terrorism, which has long been a global phenomenon. And right in the midst of this lies Israel, whose right to exist, according to Angela Merkel, is a matter of German national interest. Turkey remains a key country here as well. Its Turkish-German minority puts Germany in an excellent position to help strengthen Turkey's relationship with Europe and the EU, and to build bridges in difficult situations; and makes it in Germany's best interest to do so.

Europe has to make itself relevant to the US if it wishes to continue benefitting from vital security guarantees.

Russia currently represents a much more difficult case. Since President Vladimir Putin's famous conciliatory speech to the German Bundestag in 2001, the relationship has continuously deteriorated and there are few points of departure for a real improvement. Despite there being a great need for credible arms control, Europe plays hardly any role in this. Since it clings to a traditionalist view of superpower relations and sovereignty, Russia is scarcely able to view the European Union as an equal; its negotiating partner is therefore the US. Having said that, the new German government must achieve a balancing act, and it must do so with the EU in tow, since the "special relationships" repeatedly proposed by Russia are out of the question. Our values must be non-negotiable and we must act as an ally to democratic civil society in Russia; at the same time, however, the new German government will have to be pragmatic and work on achieving a balance with this important neighbour wherever common interests demand. A governing coalition that includes both the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens will no doubt generate interesting debates on this subject.

Transatlantic Partnership Will Come at a Price

The cornerstone for this, but also for the ability of Germany and Europe to realise their global interests, remains – and this is the third focus – close transatlantic relations with the United States.

Increasingly impatient: The US may in future estimate the value of the transatlantic partnership first and foremost on the basis of Europe's contribution to the systemic rivalry with China. Source: © Kevin Lamarque, Reuters.

The Trump years destroyed trust in this relationship, which will be hard to rebuild, especially if the new administration simply replaces "America First" with "Buy American" and with uncoordinated, unilateral decisions, as witnessed in Afghanistan. The Anglo-American AUKUS alliance with Australia and Britain certainly did little to build trust, either. Nevertheless, this clearly demonstrates that Europe has to make itself relevant to the US if it wishes to continue benefitting from vital security guarantees that Europe cannot realistically provide for itself.

Economically, the way forward is clear: a joint free-trade agreement should be an important priority, and the EU-US Trade and Technology Council, established for technological coordination, is moving in the right direction. This must be followed by coordinated action to reform the WTO, even if this is another area in which the US shifts its gaze toward the Indo-Pacific region. Still, the primary means of establishing relevance is to assume more responsibility and more of the burden in Europe's own backyard – NATO's east flank, North Africa, the

Middle East, our overall NATO contribution – and despite all the problems, this should be the easier task. On the other hand, the US increasingly appears to view its relationship with Europe through the lens of its relationship to China and expects Europe to adopt an unconditional stance – yet especially for Germany, strong economic dependence on China makes that problematic. Plus, it remains entirely open whether China is willing to go along with the EU's tidy compartmentalisation efforts, which aim to view China as partner, competitor, and system rival all in one, reaching for different components of its tool box where necessary. Even at home – not to mention among our partners in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – many find it hard to fully accept the conceptual framework of the new "Conflict of Systems". It takes little imagination to identify this as yet another area where the new German government will have its work cut out for it.

It is indisputable, however, that democracies like Germany are being challenged on the global stage, with actors such as Russia and China making robust attempts, even within Germany and the EU, to influence our affairs. Strategies are needed to defend ourselves against cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns that assault and do long-term damage to the substance of democracies and to the trust that they need to function. At the same time, any government that takes its own values seriously is obliged to promote democracy and support players in civil society all over the world. Any new government can be expected to continue a committed international human rights policy.

Seeking Solidarity with Like-Minded Countries throughout the World

A good idea in any case is an "alliance of multilateralists" – and here we can build on existing relationships, seeking partners that, like Germany, favour a values-led, rules-based international order and with absolutely no desire to see a new chorus of superpowers in which only the latter have a say. While the term sounds positive, it alone will not make a difference any more than Germany's many "strategic partnerships" – which leave us wondering what is actually strategic about them. In any event, the term is presumably more helpful than rehabilitating "the West" and explaining why countries such as Japan and India are somehow part of "the West". Both, however, clearly rank among those countries with whom a close alliance should be sought in international organisations, too. That the same applies to Australia, New Zealand, and Canada goes without saying, just as it does to Great Britain, which, Brexit notwithstanding, must remain as closely tied to Germany and the European Union as possible. In all of these cases and more, the use of Europe's famous "soft power" is especially called for, including a committed expansion of intercultural programmes, from youth exchanges to the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD, from platforms run by the Goethe Institute to media outreach supported by Deutsche Welle. For all its economic power, Germany is much too timid in this regard. There are also many countries in Latin America that have strong historical and cultural ties to Europe but have received too little attention in this area and do little themselves to attract it. It is particularly the major players like Mexico and Brazil, which are natural partners, that punch far below their weight; the ambitions of countries like Columbia and Chile in the OECD context offer promising starting points for partnerships; and we do not yet want to write off MERCOSUR, despite the wealth of disappointments we have experienced there.

The European Union, our immediate European neighbours, transatlantic relationships and NATO, multilateralism – if we leave it at that, there still remain visible gaps. First and foremost is Africa, our neighbouring continent, whose importance for Germany and Europe is beyond any doubt and not just in terms of migration and combating the causes of flight – current migration statistics show that these can be found in Central and South Asia as well. Africa's young population and spectacular demographic growth, booming megacities, wealth of resources, glimmers of democratic hope,

the weight of its over 50 votes in international organisations, and unfortunately its numerous conflicts make it exceptionally important for Germany. Nevertheless, commitment beyond a focus on development policy has remained modest, with England and France making the most of their head start as the traditionally dominant powers – even though the spectre of colonialism continues to haunt them. In its efforts to address its history, Germany has, at any rate, set an example that can be built upon.

Structural questions remain, and while these arise every four years with comforting regularity, they rarely lead to major reforms in governmental structures – a finding confirmed once more with the recent formation of the new German government. Key voices once again asked whether we need an independent Ministry of Development. Should this be affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or would a better solution be one that more directly addresses foreign trade? Would it even make sense to have a new structure uniting, say, the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development with the Ministry for the Environment, creating a ministry charged with issues of global concern, possibly even in conjunction with agricultural questions? The possibilities are endless, as are the self-interested commentaries. Presumably, however, none of these solutions would have eliminated the problem of silo mentalities, especially given that many other ministries are internationally active as well, not to mention the European level. Whether a federal security council could provide some assistance here or whether it has any chance of becoming reality still remains to be seen. What seems certain, at least, is that the desire for totally uniform international engagement is likely to remain a pipe dream.

– translated from German –

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An elderly woman casts her vote under the eyes of young people at a polling station in Ngozi (Burundi) during the 2020 presidential, parliamentary, and communal council elections.
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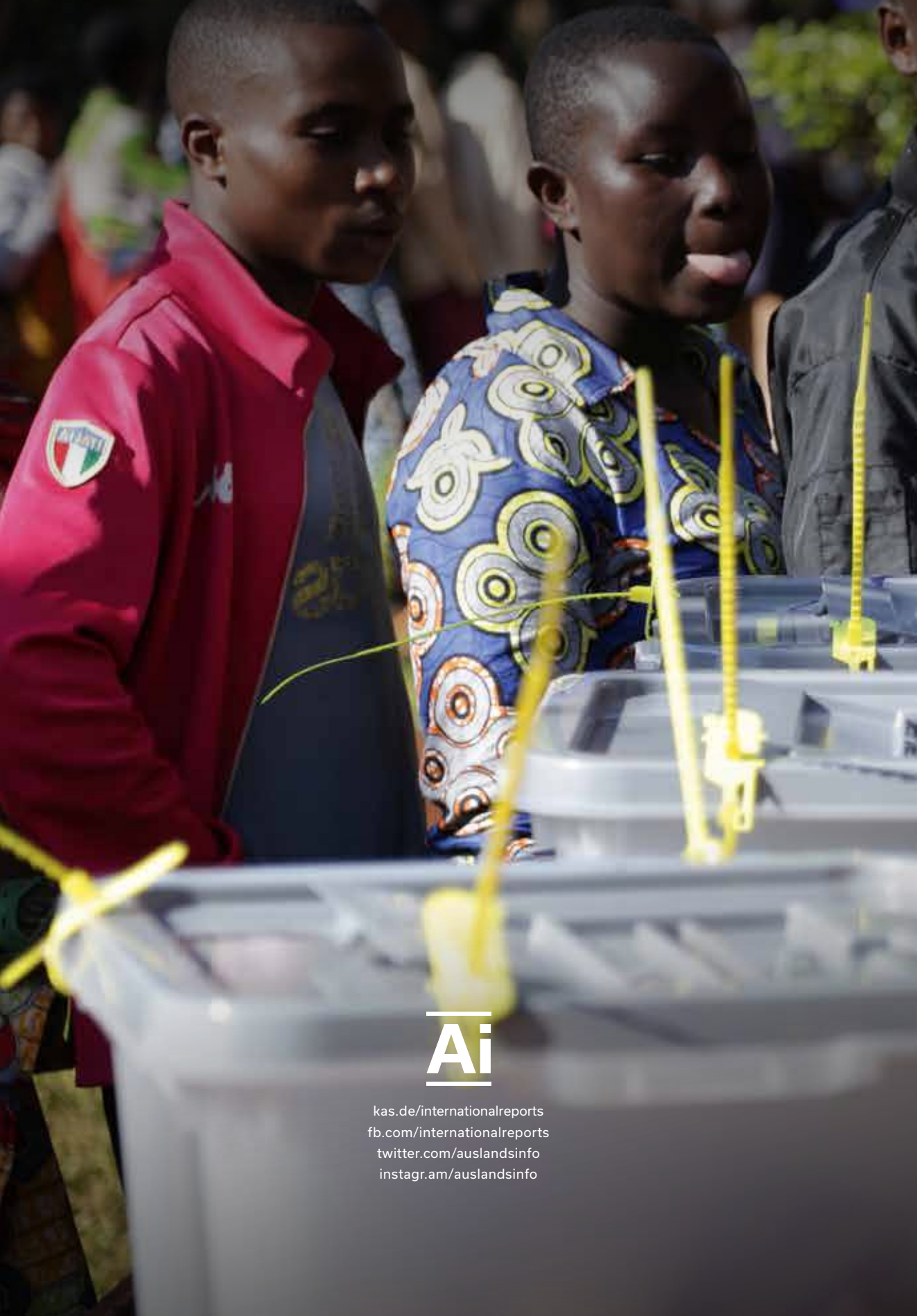

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