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Abstract
Kenya's Gen Z uprising began on 18 June 2024 and peaked between 25 June and mid-July 2024, when nationwide demonstrations against the Finance Bill 2024 forced the Bill's withdrawal and the Cabinet's dissolution. It recurred, in altered form and with different proximate triggers, through the protests of June and July 2025. Existing analyses have interpreted the uprising principally through digital mobilisation. This article argues that such accounts describe the mechanism of coordination while leaving unexplained the process of political formation that accompanied it. We advance the Socialisation Rupture model — inherited socialisation order, reproduction failure, counter-socialisation and coercive backlash — to argue that the uprising indexes a rupture in the intergenerational transmission of political identity, in which ethnicity, patronage, family-based loyalty and organised religion no longer reliably reproduce inherited orientations among a stratum of urban, educated, digitally connected young Kenyans. Following Tufekci (2017), we treat digital platforms not as neutral instruments but as agents of socialisation in their own right, alongside shared economic precarity and the 2010 Constitution as civic discourse. Methodologically, the article is a qualitative, theory-building case study; its evidentiary base is a purposively assembled documentary corpus of published scholarship, human rights documentation and the movement's publicly archived discursive repertoire, covering 18 June 2024 to 7 July 2025, analysed through qualitative content analysis and abductive pattern-matching. The article defends a conditional claim. A rupture in transmission is evident; a completed transformation of social reproduction is not. The political elite's post-2024 resurrection of ethnic bargaining and co-optation through the broad-based government shows that reproduction failure is uneven, contested, and potentially reversible. The contribution is an extension of Mannheim's sociology of generations to the digital Global South, not a rival theory of collective action.

Introduction
In June 2024, Kenyans turned to the streets against a Finance Bill and the country's entrenched political structures. The protesters were mainly a generation born after 2000, whose consciousness formed in an environment markedly different from that of their forebears. Whereas prior generations' identities were shaped by kin networks, parties, the church, and patron–client relationships, today's youth

acquire political awareness through digitally mediated environments (Castells, 2012; Loader et al., 2014). Their protest formed with unusual speed and without formal structures; participants called themselves tribeless, leaderless and fearless, advocating issue-based, networked participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

We do not treat digital platforms as neutral instruments that a generation formed elsewhere later picked up to coordinate. As Tufekci (2017) and Global South social-movement scholarship insist, digital spaces are themselves agents of socialisation: the tribeless, accountability-centred consciousness at issue was not carried into X (formerly Twitter) Spaces and TikTok ready-made but co-created within them. Our argument is not that socialisation matters instead of digital mobilisation, but that the digital environment is a socialising agent rather than a channel, and that the literature has read it almost exclusively as the latter.

This organises the paper's deliberately restricted claim. The first proposition is that a rupture occurred in the transmission of inherited political identity: the agents which historically reproduced Kenya's political subject failed, in this episode, to reproduce it among a substantial and vocal stratum of the young. That can be argued from the public record, and this article argues it. The second is that Kenya's system of social reproduction has been transformed; that cannot be established on this evidence, and we do not advance it. What the case exhibits is a contested, in-progress transition whose outcome remains undetermined.

Political systems depend not only on formal institutions but on how citizens acquire political values and identities from the family, schools, social networks and the media (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Sapiro, 2004); when that process falters, younger citizens develop values different from those they inherited (Mannheim, 1928/1952). In Kenya, it was long conditioned by ethnicity, patronage, the party and the community (Branch, 2011; Cheeseman et al., 2019). Gen Z activism suggests these mechanisms no longer reliably instil inherited values among the stratum that led the uprising, and that alternative agents transmit identities built on accountability, economic justice and participation (Loader et al., 2014; Tufekci, 2017). Nor was the Finance Bill the origin of the grievance: the 2010 Constitution had expanded civic space and licensed expectations of dignity and accountability which 14 years of implementation did not meet, an accumulated shortfall that was itself an internal catalyst, long in the making (Section 7).

From the June 2024 spark to a prolonged crisis, 2024–2025

Demonstrations against the Finance Bill 2024 began on 18 June 2024 and spread nationally within a week. On 25 June, protesters breached the parliamentary precinct as the Bill was passed; police used live ammunition, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) recorded 60 deaths and 601 injuries countrywide between 18 June and 15 July 2024 (KNCHR, 2024a, 2024b). President Ruto declined to sign the Bill on 28 June and dismissed almost the entire Cabinet on 11 July. The crisis did not end there. On 24 July the President nominated four senior figures of the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) to the Cabinet, inaugurating the broad-based government, with a formal United Democratic Alliance–ODM partnership following in March 2025; the second half of 2024 saw a documented pattern of abductions of activists, bloggers and online content creators (KNCHR, 2024b; Journalists for Justice, 2025); and the movement's demands shifted from fiscal grievance to police accountability, with protests on 25 June and Saba Saba Day, 7 July 2025, again met with lethal force. The 2024–2025 span is therefore the unit of analysis: the elite response and the movement's survival under it determine whether a rupture in transmission becomes a transformation of reproduction.

The argument and the contribution

Socialisation is not solely a matter of reproduction; it can generate a novel synthesis when a generation encounters circumstances different from those of its elders (Mannheim, 1928/1952). We offer a framework, Socialisation Rupture, specifying when and how the agents of political socialisation lose the capacity to maintain political traditions. Drawing on political socialisation literature (Easton & Dennis, 1969), Mannheim's (1928/1952) sociology of generations, social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and social-movement theory (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), we read the uprising as a struggle over representation and the meaning of citizenship, not merely opposition to a financial policy.

The state of the literature and the gap

Scholarship on the uprising clusters around four strands: digital mobilisation, showing how X and TikTok enabled rapid, leaderless organisation through hashtags such as #RejectFinanceBill2024 and #OccupyParliament (Ingutia, 2025) and let citizens bypass party structures (Nyabola, 2018; Castells, 2012); state power and the management of youth mobilisation; civic accountability, treating protest as a new citizenship practice; and an African-wide youth transformation marked by demographic shift and economic exclusion (Africa Centre for Open Governance [AfriCOG], 2024). All share an analytic deficiency: they treat the uprising as something the generation did rather than as something it was becoming. Yet no political system remains stable unless its values and loyalties are passed down, and panel evidence has long shown how far the young reproduce parental orientations (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Sapiro, 2004). The core question is not what the uprising was about or how it mobilised, but how a generation formed within Kenya's political order came to refuse its inheritance. We argue that it signifies a socialisation rupture: a breakdown of intergenerational political reproduction.

Design, corpus and procedure

The article employs a qualitative, theory-building case study design (Yin, 2018): it generates the model from theory and probes its plausibility against a single, information-rich case. We did not survey respondents, convene focus groups, or conduct computational text mining of X or TikTok; we assembled and read a bounded documentary corpus, purposively selected within the window 18 June 2024 to 7 July 2025. Inclusion required that a source be publicly retrievable, address the uprising or the Kenyan context directly, and — for the movement's discursive repertoire — be attested in at least two independent published sources. The corpus comprises five strata.

Table 1: Composition of the documentary corpus (16 documents and one bounded discursive repertoire).

Stratum	Materials	Window	Inclusion criterion
A. Movement discursive repertoire	Six recurrent hashtags (#RejectFinanceBill2024, #OccupyParliament, #OccupyEverywhere, #RutoMustGo, #RejectBudgetedCorruption, #SabaSaba) and the self-descriptive slogan set "tribeless, leaderless, fearless", as reproduced and dated in published sources	18 Jun 2024 – 7 Jul 2025	Attested in ≥ 2 independent published sources
B. Scholarly and analytical treatments of the uprising	Peer-reviewed articles, journal essays and policy analyses addressing the 2024–2025 uprising directly (3 items)	2024 – 2026	Substantive analysis of the uprising, not incidental mention
C. Human rights documentation	Statements and reports of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights; compiled documentation of Amnesty International Kenya, Human Rights Watch, the Law Society of Kenya and Missing Voices (3 items)	Jun 2024 – Aug 2025	Primary monitoring body or direct compilation of primary monitoring
D. Historical and contextual scholarship	Monographs and articles on Kenyan ethnic politics, patronage, religion, protest history and political economy (9 items)	1998 – 2024	Established scholarly treatment of the inherited socialisation order
E. Legal and constitutional text	The Constitution of Kenya 2010 (1 item)	2010	Primary legal instrument invoked by participants

The repertoire is entered as reproduced and dated in published sources, not as a dataset harvested from platforms: we reviewed no scraped posts and report no counts of tweets because we collected none. The corpus is therefore weighted towards discourse salient enough to be recorded by journalists and monitors — a selection effect biasing it towards the most articulate, urban and visible participants (Section 9.2). Analysis proceeded in three stages: each document was coded against a scheme derived from political socialisation theory, with codes for agents, transmitted content, sites of transmission and disruptions; the coded repertoire was read for how participants named themselves and what authority they invoked, which warrants our characterisation of their consciousness as constitutional and cross-ethnic; and we pattern-matched abductively against the model's four elements, asking whether the record was better explained by Socialisation Rupture or by a rival account — coordination-cost reduction (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) or acute economic grievance.

Disconfirming conditions

Because the analysis's four dimensions are the model's four components, a design that merely sought them out could only confirm the model. The model would be substantially disconfirmed if (i) the uprising's leadership, framing and resource flows had run through ethnic brokers, party structures or religious authorities; (ii) mobilisation had fragmented along ethnic lines under elite pressure at its peak, as in 1992 and 2007–2008; (iii) participants' claims had been particularistic demands addressed to patrons rather than universalistic constitutional claims addressed to the state; or (iv) the state had

contained the episode through routine patronage accommodation, without exceptional coercion. The fourth is only partially satisfied, and is the strongest disconfirming evidence in the corpus: the state responded with exceptional coercion and with patronage accommodation, the broad-based government being a re-deployment of ethno-regional bargaining that materially weakened the movement's momentum.

Scope conditions and limitations

Several limits bound the study and govern every claim that follows. The uprising is still unfolding. The evidence is documentary: it reaches the public traces of political formation, not formation itself, which cannot be measured in individuals or distributed across a cohort by a design of this kind. The unit of the strong claim is not the Kenyan Gen Z cohort as a whole but the urban, educated, digitally connected stratum whose discourse the record preserves; following Mannheim (1928/1952), Gen Z here denotes a generation location and, within it, particular generation units. The corpus is English-language-dominant, underrepresenting Kiswahili and Sheng discourse and non-metropolitan participation. Finally, the analysis is interpretive; the disconfirming conditions above are stated to make an alternative reading possible.

Theoretical Framework: A Model of Socialisation Rupture

Three bodies of theory

Political socialisation describes how individuals acquire the beliefs, values and identities of the political system through mediating agents — family, school, religious institutions, the peer group, the media, the state (Hyman, 1959; Easton & Dennis, 1969; Sapiro, 2004); but socialisation can fail when its agents are delegitimised or face competing institutions (Sapiro, 2004). Easton and Dennis (1969) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) are not interchangeable, and the framework depends on the friction between them. Easton and Dennis supply the institutional roadmap: the agents, the pathways, the content transmitted, and what a system must accomplish in each generation to persist. What they do not supply is a theory of the interests that stabilisation serves. Bourdieu and Passeron state that, in an account of symbolic violence, institutions, above all the school, misrecognise the arbitrary cultural capital of dominant groups as universal competence, reproducing class domination while appearing to reward merit. Reproduction is thus not benign equilibrium maintenance but the naturalisation of unequal advantage, which explains why the reproduction Easton describes is experienced by the reproduced as extraction. Neither alone predicts rupture; together they specify its conditions. A rupture becomes possible when the misrecognition that sustains the Eastonian machinery fails — when the young see the inheritance as an instrument of domination rather than as the natural order of political life. The Finance Bill 2024 is the occasion on which it failed publicly and at scale.

The generational and structural dimensions

For Mannheim (1928/1952), a generation is defined not by birth years but by the impress of shared, historically patterned experience on consciousness. He distinguishes generation location — those occupying the same position in the life cycle within the same spatio-temporal setting; generation as actuality — the bond uniting a cohort exposed to the same destabilising events; and generation units — the distinct, sometimes antagonistic expressions of that bond. This prevents us from treating Gen Z as homogeneous and directs attention to internal differences by class, ethnicity, gender, location and digital access. Devised for early-twentieth-century Europe, the concept has been used widely elsewhere (Roberts, 2015); we extend it to argue that the consciousness at issue is shaped by shared exclusion and shared digital experience rather than shared cultural inheritance. The structural conditions are equally distinctive: demographic expansion, wider access to education, ubiquitous digital networks, marginalisation among the educated young, and the expectations raised by the 2010

constitutional settlement (Cheeseman et al., 2019; Nyabola, 2018; Moore, 1963). Whether they amount to a completed transformation is precisely what is at issue.

The four dynamics

Integrating these approaches, we specify Socialisation Rupture as four interrelated dynamics.

The inherited socialisation order comprises the institutions that long produced Kenya's political subject: ethnic affiliation and clientelist patronage, family-based political allegiance, and religious institutions and values (Branch, 2011; Lynch, 2011).

Reproduction failure occurs when these institutions cease to transmit prevailing values reliably as conditions change (Sapiro, 2004). This is a process, not an event, and it is contested and reversible: institutions under threat adapt, and the Kenyan elite responded to 2024 by resurrecting ethnic patronage and co-optation (Section 6.2).

Counter-socialisation emerges from digital counter-publics, global youth cultures, informal peer associations, and the constitutional ideals of participation, rights and good governance, generating identities centred on accountability, justice and dignity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Tufekci, 2017). The digital environment is here an agent, not a channel.

Coercive backlash occurs when institutions attempt to restore order through coercion and the securitisation of dissent (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Backlash is a symptom of reproduction failure rather than of reproductive strength: a system that can socialise does not need to shoot.

The Model against the Record: A Comparison with 1990 and 2007–2008

Distinctiveness cannot be asserted; it must be shown against cases in which the same mediators once did their work.

The Saba Saba agitation of 7 July 1990 produced mass urban confrontation with the state after Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia called for a rally at Kamukunji and were detained, and the state met it with lethal force. What matters is what happened next: discontent was captured, and thereby contained, by exactly the mediators the 2024 movement bypassed. Multi-party agitation was channelled into an opposition led by established ethno-regional patrons; by the 1992 election, the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy had split into FORD-Kenya and FORD-Asili, and the incumbent was returned on roughly a third of the vote (Throup & Hornsby, 1998; Branch, 2011). Elders, brokers and patrons converted a universalistic democratic demand into a distribution of ethnic claims. The crisis of 2007–2008 shows the same mechanism operating on youth violence rather than protest: post-election mobilisation was organised through ethnic networks, the young men who fought being mobilised as members of communities by community-based political entrepreneurs (Mueller, 2008; Lynch, 2011), and it was resolved not by any response to popular demand but by an elite pact — the National Accord — which redistributed office among the very patrons whose competition had produced the violence (Branch, 2011; Cheeseman et al., 2019).

Set against these, the distinctiveness of 2024–2025 lies not in the fact of youth anger, nor of state violence, but in the failure of the mediators at the point of framing. Patronage was offered and did not command; ethnic brokerage was attempted and did not fragment the mobilisation at its peak; appeals to patience from religious and elder authority did not move the participants.

The Inherited Socialisation Order

Since independence, several agents have transmitted the notion that politics is chiefly a contest between communities over state resources, rooted in ethnicity, with political belonging mediated by

family and community. Ethnic belonging is reproduced through kinship networks into which members are socialised, so that ethnic attachment came to be inherited rather than chosen: ethnicity in Kenya is not primordial but an interpretation reproduced by processes transmitting social memory across generations, sustaining loyalties to ethnic groups and community leaders (Lynch, 2011).

Second, and most prominently, the order relied on patronage: access to education, health services, public employment and development programmes was distributed through political connection (Cheeseman et al., 2019), producing a subject who approaches the state not as an institution accountable to citizens but as a dispenser of favours contingent on one's patron — in Bourdieusian terms, sustained by the misrecognition of extraction as provision. Religious institutions related to power ambivalently, sometimes challenging it, as sections of the clergy did in the late 1980s, but often validating politicians and appealing for patience during unrest (Kagwanja, 2003; Ndzovu, 2014); parties mobilise by emphasising ethno-regional identity; and education has imparted nationalism and social order rather than active citizenship.

Five mechanisms of erosion

The inherited agents formally endured, but their effectiveness declined: socialisation hinges on the credibility of its agents, and where institutions failed to meet the expectations they had set, youth disengaged and developed alternative orientations (Sapiro, 2004). Five mechanisms were decisive.

The first was the collapse of the patronage bargain. Patron–client systems reproduce loyalty by exchanging resources and protection for support (Lynch, 2011; Cheeseman et al., 2019), but destabilise when benefits fail to match expectations. Afrobarometer's Round 10 Kenya survey, fielded six weeks before the uprising, found 80% of citizens aged 18–35 holding secondary or post-secondary qualifications against 43–58% of older cohorts, yet 43% seeking work against 23–32% of the middle-aged (AfriCOG, 2024; Kamau et al., 2025). Loyalty no longer secured careers or access to power. The system lost credibility not because Gen Z rejected patronage as ideology but because it could not deliver its promised returns — raising a question we address in Section 9.1: whether what failed was the legitimacy of the bargain or merely its solvency.

The second was the generational memory gap. Consciousness is formed by a generation's defining experiences (Mannheim, 1928/1952). Older Kenyan generations lived through authoritarian rule, the ethnic violence accompanying the transition to multi-party politics, and the trauma of 2007–2008; these memories bred caution and a fear of instability. Much of Gen Z has no equivalent adult memory of such trauma and, with less to fear from confronting authority, is more inclined to question institutions that past generations had accepted with resignation.

The third was the weakening of ethnic gatekeepers. Socialisation had long been channelled through ethnic leaders, chiefs and brokers who framed events in ethnic terms (Branch, 2011; Lynch, 2011). Digital communication bypassed this mediated flow, enabling peer-to-peer exchange across ethnic lines around shared grievances of unemployment, inequality and governance (Castells, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Platforms did not invent these grievances, but eroded gatekeepers' control of political discourse.

The fourth was the decline of moral authority. Religious institutions and political elites had shaped norms of citizenship, obedience and justice; as concern grew over collusion between religious leaders and politicians, moral authorities came to seem compromised. Their erosion opened the way for alternative norms — the constitutional principles of accountability, rights and participatory democracy (Republic of Kenya, 2010; Kagwanja, 2003).

The fifth was the education paradox. Education historically transmitted political values and national identity (Easton & Dennis, 1969), but its rapid expansion produced a generation of greater analytical capacity. Where access to education expanded as opportunity contracted, educated youth were better equipped to interrogate budget allocations, invoke the Constitution and mobilise online. Education, expected to foster obedience, instead furnished the skills to dissent — an outcome Bourdieu and Passeron's account of the school as an instrument of reproduction does not anticipate, and which marks a limit of that account.

Reproductive adaptation: how the order fought back

The inherited order is not a passive object of rupture; it adapts, and in Kenya, it adapted quickly. Within a month of the storming of Parliament, the President dissolved his Cabinet and reconstituted it on 24 July 2024 by nominating four senior ODM figures — John Mbadi, Opiyo Wandayi, Hassan Joho and Wycliffe Oparanya — to senior portfolios. The resulting broad-based government was not a response to the movement's universalistic demands; it was a re-deployment of the oldest instrument in the repertoire, ethno-regional bargaining. It offered no accountability for the dead, but it divided the political field along familiar regional lines, deprived the protests of an opposition ally, and re-established the proposition that political goods are obtained through elite negotiation rather than public claim-making. Alongside co-optation, the state deployed abduction and enforced disappearance against precisely those actors — bloggers, online creators, digital organisers — who had constituted the counter-socialising environment. That the response targeted the medium of counter-socialisation as much as the participants is itself evidence for the model.

The claim that traditional institutions can no longer transmit prevailing values is thus too strong, and we do not make it: they failed to transmit them to a particular stratum at a particular moment, and the state's adaptation partially restored their operation. This is why the framework treats reproduction failure as a contested process, and why the title of this article poses a question.

Counter-Socialisation: New Agents, New Consciousness

A generation inadequately socialised by inherited institutions is not de-socialised but shaped by other agents. Gen Z's emergent consciousness — inter-ethnic solidarity, accountability claims, constitutional awareness and aspirations to dignity — arose through a new configuration of socialising forces.

The most powerful was the digital counter-public. Existing scholarship rightly shows the role of X, TikTok and other platforms in mobilisation and rapid information flow (Castells, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Ingutia, 2025); we argue they functioned as agents of political socialisation. In these spaces, young Kenyans made sense of developments together, circulated analyses of the Bill, discussed their rights under the Constitution, narrated economic hardship and constructed a shared understanding of state and citizenship (Mbugua, 2025). Unlike established institutions, whose socialising interactions ran top-down from political and communal elders, those in digital networks were horizontal, shifting authority from position towards participation and argument (Castells, 2012); their transnational reach exposed Kenyan youth to comparative movements, making existing arrangements seem contestable rather than fixed. Algorithmic curation is part of this story rather than external to it: what circulated, and to whom, was shaped by platform architectures whose effects on political formation remain, on our corpus, undocumented and in need of dedicated study.

The second agent was shared economic precarity, which built solidarity beyond inherited ethnic bonds. Faced with common conditions of unemployment, insecurity, and blocked opportunity, a political consciousness took shape around a shared economic position — resembling class-based

solidarity but grounded in shared precarity rather than an established class (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015).

The third agent was the Constitution as civic discourse, which supplied much of the movement's language: rights, accountability, participation and popular sovereignty. It did more, however, than furnish a vocabulary: its Bill of Rights, its guarantees of expression, assembly, demonstration and petition, its provisions for access to information and for public participation in legislative and budgetary processes, and its affirmation of youth representation together constituted a formal domain of citizenship the young could occupy as of right rather than at a patron's discretion (Republic of Kenya, 2010). For a generation that came of age after 2010 this was the constitutive horizon of political expectation, and it is against that horizon that grievance was measured: the discourse turned repeatedly on the judgement that the guarantees of dignity and the obligations of accountability had not been realised, the document that had socialised the generation into an expectation of entitlement being a text the state implemented as procedure while evading as substance (Cheeseman et al., 2019; Nyabola, 2018). The Constitution therefore performed a double socialising function: it supplied the standard against which state conduct was assessed and, in the distance between standard and conduct, supplied the grievance itself. The quarrel was not with the constitutional inheritance but with the political class that had failed to inhabit it — a refusal, in Mannheim's (1928/1952) terms, directed less at the inheritance than at those entrusted with its transmission.

Coercive Backlash: Defending the Monopoly on Reproduction

Unable to re-socialise a generation it had not formed, the state defended by coercion a monopoly on political reproduction it could no longer secure by consent. The scale of that coercion is documented in primary human rights sources. The KNCHR, the state's own constitutional human rights body, recorded 60 deaths and 601 injuries countrywide between 18 June and 15 July 2024, together with 32 cases of enforced or involuntary disappearance and 627 arrests as at 1 July 2024, and characterised the force as excessive and disproportionate (KNCHR, 2024a, 2024b). Independent monitors recorded higher figures still — Amnesty International Kenya at least 65 killed, Human Rights Watch at least 63 killed and 87 abducted to October 2024, the Law Society of Kenya at least 72 enforced disappearances (Journalists for Justice, 2025) — so 60 is a conservative official minimum.

The targets of the abductions were disproportionately activists, bloggers and online content creators — the personnel of the counter-socialising environment. The protests of June and July 2025 against police impunity were recorded by the KNCHR and Amnesty International Kenya as producing 19 deaths, 531 injuries and 15 enforced disappearances on 25 June 2025 alone; by 11 July, the Commission had recorded at least 38 deaths in connection with the Saba Saba demonstrations (Journalists for Justice, 2025).

Coercion here is not the opposite of socialisation but its residue: what remains of a reproductive apparatus when the transmission it depended upon has failed.

Discussion: A Contested Transition, Not a Completed Transformation

Viewed through the lens of social-media mobilisation, Kenya's Gen Z uprising resembles any networked movement; understood as a Socialisation Rupture, it is a contested and unfinished transition between two reproductive regimes.

Durable identity change or acute grievance?

The most serious objection is one our own account of the patronage bargain invites: if it lost credibility because it could not deliver its returns, the mechanism may be economic grievance rather than identity

change, and the new consciousness merely the discursive surface of a material shock that should recede when conditions improve.

Three features tell against a purely grievance-based reading. First, the claims were not distributive: a grievance-driven mobilisation seeks better terms within the existing bargain, whereas participants demanded accountability, constitutional compliance and an end to abductions — goods no patron can distribute and no improvement in employment would supply. Second, the movement survived the withdrawal of its proximate grievance: the Bill was abandoned on 28 June 2024, yet mobilisation continued and recurred a year later around police impunity. A grievance mechanism predicts demobilisation upon concession; the record shows displacement onto a constitutional claim. Third, the self-description was identitarian, not distributive: tribeless, leaderless, fearless is a statement about who the participants are and what they refuse to inherit.

Three features speak in favour of caution. The demonstrations of 2025 were substantially smaller than those of 2024. The broad-based government showed that a segment of the political field could be reconstituted along ethno-regional lines at little apparent cost. And none of our evidence reaches individual attitudes over time: a cohort that repudiates patronage at 22 while unemployed may accommodate it at 32 while employed. Grievance alone cannot explain the content of the claims, the persistence of mobilisation after concession, or the identitarian form of the self-description; but durability is not established, and cannot be established by this design. The conditions of rupture are structural, the rupture itself conjunctural, and its consolidation into transformation contingent — on organisation, on state response, and on the electoral test to come.

Whose generation? The scope of the claim

The strong claims of the socialisation literature concern generations, but the evidence here concerns a self-selected, urban, educated, digitally connected stratum — a vanguard, in Mannheim's terms, a generation unit that has achieved actuality, not the cohort as a whole. Mannheim's device manages this conceptually, licensing us to say that a generation unit may carry a consciousness on behalf of a generation location without the whole cohort sharing it, but conceptual management is not evidential bridging. We therefore restrict the argument: where this article claims that inherited socialisation failed, the claim is about the stratum that led and articulated the uprising; where it speaks of Kenyan Gen Z, it denotes a generation location whose orientation as a whole is unmeasured. Whether the rural, the unconnected and the less educated majority share the vanguard's orientation is an open question of the first importance, and bears directly on whether the transition can be institutionalised. Afrobarometer's Round 10 Kenya survey (n = 2,400), fielded weeks before the uprising, supplies a pre-rupture baseline rather than a test: it is a repeated cross-section, not a panel, and measures attitudes rather than formation. A Round 11 comparison would directly bound the vanguard's representativeness. Nor does the argument claim that ethnic identity will cease to matter; the claim is narrower — that ethno-nationalist and patronage politics no longer automatically secure the loyalty of the stratum in question.

Conclusion

Kenya's Gen Z uprising is less a product of digital mobilisation than a crisis of political socialisation within an unfinished social transition. The agencies that once produced the Kenyan political subject — ethnicity, clientelism, family allegiance, the church — weakened as transmitters of loyalty under new conditions, while new agencies — the digital counter-public, shared precarity, global youth cultures, the Constitution as civic document — cultivated an identity of accountability, rights, dignity and cross-ethnic citizenship. The principal contribution is theoretical: the Kenyan case extends Mannheim's sociology of generations to the digital Global South and amends it, for here a generation

in actuality may be forged not through shared cultural inheritance but through shared exclusion, shared digital environments, and a common refusal of inherited political identities. The Socialisation Rupture model takes its place alongside, not in opposition to, the connective action and contentious politics literatures from which it borrows (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; Roberts, 2015). It also offers a starting point for comparative research across a continent where similar generational tensions are emerging (AfriCOG, 2024). Movements such as #EndSARS in Nigeria share characteristics with the Kenyan case, though differences persist, owing to the strength of patronage, the openness of the digital environment and the level of state coercion; Kenya is distinctive in the pivotal reference role of the 2010 Constitution and in the pan-Kenyan self-description of its youth mobilisation.

The study's implications follow from its limits. For theory: analyses of youth uprisings should incorporate political socialisation alongside digital mobilisation, since the digital explains how youth organise and participate in forming their beliefs, but only an account of socialisation explains why particular values emerge rather than others. For policy: coercion and symbolic inclusion cannot resolve a rupture in reproduction, leaving untouched the economic insecurity, accountability deficit and declining institutional trust that produce it. For research, measuring the distribution of political orientations across a cohort and observing their formation in individual lives are the tasks of nationally representative panel surveys and ethnography, and must now be undertaken. These propositions are offered for testing. The lesson of Kenya's Gen Z revolt lies not in the protests themselves but in the struggle, still undecided, over who holds the authority to define the next generation's political identity.

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