

# Youth-led Demonstrations in Kenya Spread to Other African States

Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana are facing the threat of mass protests over bad governance and corruption

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***Demonstrations erupted during mid-June in the East African state of Kenya which encompasses the largest economy in the sub-region.***

*The now withdrawn **Finance Bill**, which would have imposed large tax hikes on consumer goods and services, prompted a series of protests where the Kenyan police killed and wounded dozens of people for exercising their democratic rights to assembly and speech.*

*After the announcement by **President William Ruto** that he would not sign the bill, the youth then demanded his resignation. In response to demonstrations every Tuesday and Thursday, Ruto dissolved his cabinet, firing most of the members.*

Nonetheless, the demonstrations are continuing under the slogan of “Enough is Enough”. Many young people are angered by a perceived indifference to the plight of the working and poor people in Kenya. They do not see the existing government under Ruto as providing any viable alternative to the political status quo.

On July 23, a pro-government grouping came into the streets on motorcycles calling for a harsher police crackdown on the “Enough is Enough” movement. On that same day, anti-government protesters attempted to block access to the airport outside the capital of Nairobi to press for the resolution of their demands. The police had declared the airport area as non-negotiable regarding protest actions.

Consequently, there were additional clashes between the police and the pro-government forces on the one hand against the youth-led protesters. It was not immediately clear who was financing the pro-government grouping. Undoubtedly, the group is closely allied and sponsored by the Ruto administration.

Demonstrations were also held on July 23 in other major cities throughout Kenya including Mombasa, the coastal port city on the Indian Ocean, the town of Kisumu near Lake Victoria and in Migori. Kenyan police have used lethal force to stem the demonstrations which have in some instances turned violent.

[A recent report](#) in the Kenya Star claimed that Members of Parliament (MPs) and even three staff aides of Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua have been detained and questioned by members of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI). They are being investigated for ostensibly funding people to damage businesses and loot goods from stores. The MPs and the Deputy President have denied these allegations.

Since mid-June when the demonstrations began, there have been reports of kidnappings by police of activists. Due to these reports, the Kenyan Supreme Court did issue a ruling prohibiting such operations by law-enforcement personnel.

These demonstrations have had a negative impact on the Kenyan economy domestically and internationally. The government reasoning behind the proposed tax hikes is clearly related to the burgeoning debt obligations which were being passed on to the workers and youth.

Due to the rising prices for commodities and services, the standard of living inside the country has declined significantly. It has become almost impossible for youth to feel optimistic about their future.

These variables have [taken a toll](#) on the value of the national currency, the shilling, causing even more uncertainty for consumers:

“The Kenyan shilling has continued to experience significant volatility against major currencies, something largely attributed to the disruption of trade and tourism activities due to the recent protests. The latest data from the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) shows that commercial banks closed the markets Friday (July 26) exchanging the dollar at Sh131.574. Some two weeks ago, the dollar traded at Sh128. A month ago, before the start of the protests, the shilling remained its dominance exchanging at 128.77 to the dollar before falling to 129.52 on June 27 and further to 130.46 by July 19. Financial experts have argued that the protests contributed immensely to the weakening of the shilling.”

Since the demonstrations in Kenya gained international attention, other countries have witnessed an upsurge in youth activism. In Uganda, Ghana and Nigeria there have been marches and planned protests all prompted by the overall economic crisis on the African continent.



Nigeria protests against bad governance on August 1, 2024 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

## Uganda Government Takes Steps to Stop Anti-corruption Demonstrations

In the neighboring East African state of Uganda, the government has warned youth-led demonstrators not to engage in protests demanding an end to corruption. **President Yoweri Museveni** accused the organizers of the “#March to Parliament” movement of being a threat to public order.

On July 27, the Ugandan authorities reported that 104 people had been arrested in connection with demonstrations. Police officials told the youth-led movement that additional attempts to stage rallies and marches would result in problems with law-enforcement.

[An article published by Jurist News](#) said of the recent situation that:

“Uganda’s Police Spokesperson Kituuma Rusoke stated, ‘Between July 22 and July 25, 2024, demonstrators attempted to #MarchToParliament in Kampala, leading to significant police intervention.’... The protestors are part of a youth-led march against the rise of corruption in the Ugandan Parliament. On July 23, the march resulted in several opposition National Unity Platform (NUP) members being arrested. The parliamentary opposition leader, Joel Ssenyonyi, accused the police of using excessive force. Even though the demonstration was decentralized and planned through social media, officials banned it due to public order concerns. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni also purportedly warned that protestors were ‘playing with fire.’”

Accusations have been made over the last several months over widespread corruption within the Ugandan parliament. Although the government says it is investigating the allegations, the #MarchtoParliament movement feels compelled to hold public

demonstrations against the Museveni administration.

## **Nigerian Youth Stage Demonstrations Against Bad Governance**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria has the largest population of any other African state on the continent with 230 million people. Even though Nigeria is rich with crude oil, the failure to modernize its petroleum extraction and refinement infrastructure has held back the country from achieving qualitative development.

On August 1, there were mass demonstrations in several cities across the country. The focus of the protests centered on the problems related to bad governance.

President Bola Tinubu, who was just sworn into office last year, has imposed austerity measures including the lifting of subsidies for fuel and other commodities which has caused prices to skyrocket due to the decline in the value of the national currency, the Naira. The police, military and political officials are quite concerned about the potential for social unrest. In 2020, a nationwide rebellion took place demanding the liquidation of a controversial police unit ostensibly designed to end armed robberies.

Despite the apparent deliberate interference with the operations of the internet and telecommunications services on August 1, [News Central Africa reported](#):

“Economic activities have come to a halt as the much anticipated #EndBadGovernance protest began in several cities across the country. From Abuja to Abeokuta and Port Harcourt to Lagos, banks and businesses have closed, leaving roads unusually empty as protesters defy last-minute efforts by authorities to stop the demonstrations. In Kaduna, typically bustling streets are deserted as protesters march to voice their grievances about poor living conditions. Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, is grappling with soaring inflation and a sharply devalued naira after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu implemented economic reforms a year ago aimed at reviving the economy. The protest movement tagged #EndbadGovernanceinNigeria, has gained traction online, with many Nigerians struggling with 40 percent food inflation and fuel prices that have tripled since Tinubu’s reforms. In Abuja, security forces have blocked roads leading to Eagle Square, a planned protest site, while in Lagos, police and soldiers are stationed at key locations, including the Lekki tollgate, a site of violent protests in 2020.”

These demonstrations follow a brief general strike by the trade unions during early June demanding a raise in the minimum wage to stave off the impact of hyperinflation. The industrial actions in June came just eight months after other strikes in October 2023.

## **The Role of Youth and the Crisis in African Political Economy**

In Ghana a High Court ruling has issued a ban on demonstrations in that West African state. Similar issues which have prompted protests and rebellions in other states are motivating the youth in Ghana as well. See [this](#).

**It is not surprising that young people are emerging to oppose the worsening economic situation in various African states. In Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, the neo-liberal approach of governments is rooted in the incapacity to pay down international financial debt obligations at the aegis of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).**

African Union (AU) member-states encompass the youngest population in the world. Some 70% of the population on the continent are under the age of 30. See [this](#).

If organized properly, these young people would be in a position to make an enormous contribution to the transformation of the continent from Neo-colonialism to Pan-Africanism and Socialism. The unification of Africa is essential for the eradication of poverty and the transition to a path towards sustainable development.

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*Featured image: Demonstrators opposed to the "Finance Bill 2024", which proposes a tax bill, march towards the parliament building to protest against the Kenyan President William Ruto in Nairobi, Kenya on July 23, 2024. (Source)*

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