

YOUTH MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA

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My research investigates how youth movements can help improve democracies in West Africa and solve issues such as poverty and terrorism. This past summer, I attended the first annual meeting of the Popular University of Citizen Engagement (UPEC) in Dakar, Senegal. This was a one-week meeting that gave the activists in Africa the opportunity to seek for ways they can put their efforts together to solve the issues pertaining to the continent.

The last decade in Africa has seen the emergence of a new form of activism. Since the Arab spring in late 2010, popular movements have been growing exponentially on the continent. Most

popular movements are created by youths who claim to be the watch dogs of their governments. One of the most successful youth movements is *Yen a Marre* (Fed Up) in Senegal. This youth movement was created in Senegal in 2011 by a group of rappers, journalists and other active members of the civil society. Their most noticeable campaign aimed at preventing former Senegalese president, Abdoulaye Wade, from securing a third presidential term, which was seen by many as unconstitutional. Even though *Yen a Marre* is not the first youth movement in Senegal, their success is unprecedented. With a civic spirit, the movement contributed decisively in the mobilization of the Senegalese youth.

Another group of youth that followed the steps of *Yen a Marre* is *Balai Citoyen* (Citizen Broom). This movement was created in Burkina Faso with the same goals as *Yen a Marre* in Senegal, which is to keep the leaders accountable and educate the citizens about their rights. In 2014, the movement was significantly instrumental in the fall of long-time ruler Blaise Compaore. The ideology of these movement goes beyond ousting presidents they think are not doing good to their country, but their primary goal is to create new types of citizens that will in the future be able to prioritize democracy their country. These youth movements can play a crucial role in the fight against terrorism.

The literature on terrorism suggests that in many countries, terrorists recruit people from the countries they want to transform. Those recruitments are facilitated by the chronic poverty that is in place in certain countries. For example, in exchange for food, young Sahelians can join a terrorist group ignoring that they are doing harm to their own country. In their project to create new types of citizens, I argue that youth movements will value patriotism so that the recruitment by terrorist groups will not be as easy as it is currently. Also, youth movements launch projects that can benefit those with talent in many informal domains and therefore reduce unemployment.

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