The Role of Kenyan Women in the Gen- Z Protest Movement Against 2024 Finance Bill in Kenya (2024-2025)

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Abstract

This study examined the role of Kenyan women in the Gen-Z protest against 2024 finance Bill in Kenya from 2024 to 2025. The study was guided by three objectives: To analyze the reasons behind Gen -Z protests in Kenya, examine the role of women in the Gen-Z protests in Kenya and investigate the challenges and the risks faced by women in the G-Z protest. This study utilized African feminist political theory which argues that African Women's political engagement and resistance must be understood within a specific cultural and historical environment in which they operate. The research then employed qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the collected data collected. The study established that, the Gen-Z protests challenged long standing patriarchal perception that women are weak and incapable of providing front-line leadership during periods of resistance. The resistance provided a platform not only for women to voice their grievances but also to assert leadership, solidarity and creativity in the resistance. Their involvement went beyond passive supportive role to encompass front-line mobilization. The research recommended that government should design strategies that prioritize women's safety in both physical and digital spaces. More importantly, young people should be included in dialogue aimed at addressing their governance problems, employment, inequality, and economic reforms. This will minimize cases of youth resistance which undermine state's stability.

Keywords: Gen-Z, Gen-Z Protest, Kenyan Women, 2024 Finance Bill, Women's Political Participation, Frontline Leadership

Background of Study

In the 21st C, the world witnessed a surge in the youth-led movements fueled by digital activism. Such activism often arises as a result of political dissatisfaction, mass unemployment and increasing awareness of human rights and social justice. In most cases the uprising has been led by Generation Z- A cohort of people born approximately between 1997and 2010. A good example was a climate strike in Europe in September 2021 which mainly agitated for use of clean energy, eradication of environmental pollution and helping climate refugees. (Gorman, 2021). Another classic example is the Black Lives Matter resistance in the United States, where young people physically and using social media condemned racialism especially after the shooting of African- American teen – Trayvon Martin and acquittal of his assassin George Zimmerman in 2013(Matter, 2020, October).

In Africa, the trend has not been different. According to Ajisafe (2021), countries like Nigeria have experienced youth-led demonstrations like the # End Sars movement which was born out of outcry against police brutality. In Sudan 2019 revolution was mainly staged by younger population agitate for a fordable economic lifestyle and democratic governance (Kadoda & Hale,2015).

In east Africa, youth led protests have been witnessed in countries like Uganda where, Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine) gained support from the youthful population sparking widespread protest when his presidential victory was allegedly rigged in 2021. The protests were mainly witnessed in urban areas such as Mbale, Soroti and Jinja. A similar scenario has also been witnessed in Tanzania where youths have staged a protest in social media to voice their anger on what they consider as bad policies such as internet censorship, ban on teenage mothers attending school and gender-based violence (Makumbi, 2022).

In Kenya, similar dynamics are witnessed. The country has a long history of protests and political engagement, but the recent development indicates a shift in nature and demographic activism. The 2024-2025 Gen-Z protests in Kenya largely mobilized through social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter(X), were a direct response to controversial fiscal policies, youth employment, corruption and poor governance.

What stood out in all these demonstrations is the strong and visible participation of young women who were not just participants, but mobilizers, organizers and a simple of resistance. In Sudan for instance around 70% of 2019 revolutionaries were women and played a crucial role in toppling the regime of Omar al-Bashir's regime. (Kadoda & Hale, 2015). A similar vigor was demonstrated by the Kenyan women in the Gen-Z protests. Their participation was visible and loud which shaped the public discourse through art, music and digital story telling. Their involvement marked a new chapter in civic engagement, challenging traditional gender roles and redefining the landscape of protest in Kenya. This study therefore sought to investigate the contribution of women in the recent Gen Z protest in Kenya examining their motivation, methods of engagement and the broader social impacts of their participation.

Statement of the Problem

In a democratic society, young women should be recognized as equals and active participants in civic and political life, with their voices influencing national discourse, policy formation and public protest. Their contributions should be uniformly celebrated, protected and integrated into mainstream narrative of democratic participation especially in movements that shape the future of the nation.

However, despite women participation 2024-2025 Gen Z protest movement against Kenyan finance Bill, their contribution remains undocumented, overlooked and unappreciated in the mainstream narrative. Besides, political narratives have tended to focus on male dominated aspects of the protests thereby neglecting the unique strategies, risks and the roles of the Kenyan women within the movement. This study therefore sought to uncover and analyze the specific roles Kenyan women played in the Gen-Z protest against the finance Bill 2024-2025.

Study Objectives

The research sought to analyse the following objectives:

- To analyze the reasons behind Gen -Z protests in Kenya
- To examine the role of women in the Gen-Z protests in Kenya
- To investigate the challenges and the risks faced by women in the G-Z protest movement

Research Questions

- What social economic and political factors contributed to the emergence of Gen-Z protests in Kenya?
- What role did Kenyan women play in the organization participation in the Gen-Z protest?
- What were the challenges countered by the Kenyan women during Gen-Z protest?

Research Assumptions

- The Gen-Z protests were a response to deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the Government policies particularly 2024 finance Bill.
- Women played significant and influential role in shaping both the narrative and direction of the Gen-Z protests movement
- Female protesters faced unique challenges and threats compared to their male counterparts.

Justification of the Study

This study is useful in contributing to the growing scholarship on the youth led movements in Africa with focus in gender analysis. The research achieved this by analyzing how young women are reshaping activism through digital tools ensuring that their experiences are not erased from historical records.

Besides, the women involvement in the Gen- Z protests challenge convectional notion of gender roles in political engagements. Indeed, their use of social media platform in organizing the protests and their physical presence in the demonstration   helps in redefining the modes of activism in Kenya and Africa at large. Documenting these emerging forms of feminist activism not only enriches the academic discourse on gender movements but also provides a practical insight for future mobilization especially in the digital age.

Additionally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the youth and women political participation in Kenya. Despite the efforts to increase women's representation in the formal political spaces, significant barriers have persisted. By focusing on the informal political engagement through protests, this research brings out alternative avenues through which women are reclaiming their space and assertion their voices in the national discourse.

Moreover, the finance bill of 2024 sparked widespread public outrage due to the heavy tax burden it proposed especially on the essential goods and services. This search is therefore a useful tool for policy makers in developing sound economic policies with tax regimes that takes recognition of the burden that women who are primarily caregivers and economic managers undergo. Furthermore, it serves as a foundation for further research, especially on digital youth resistance and feminism.

Scope and Limitation of Research

The study focused on the period between May 2024, when Gen-Z protests begun and mid 2025 when the momentum begun to shift following the withdrawal of the finance bill and continued civil engagement especially during the *Saba Saba* momentum.

In terms of the geographical scope, the study was limited to urban centers in Kenya with special emphasis on Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and Nakuru. These cities were the most active protest zones during the 2024 anti-finance bill demonstration making them ideal study area. Furthermore, Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu have a historical significance as centers of historical dissent and civic activism since independence enhancing their suitability as study areas.

It is important to mention that, due to safety, trauma or political sensitivity, some women who participated in the protests were not willing to grant interview or share their personal experience potentially limiting the collection of the information.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

There is no much literature on digital resistance. However, most of the available literature tends to align towards socio-political impacts of such resistance. For instance, Ruteere (2020) examines how Kenyan youth have increasingly used digital to demand for accountability, especially under corrupt regimes. He holds that digital protests otherwise known as hashtag movements have reshaped civic space and empowered youths to bypass convectional political structure. To him, such digital movements are organist a long issue-based structures as opposed to ethnic mobilization. While he provides a foundation for studying youth led resistance, it does not explore the unique role of women in such resistance.

Apart from this, Nzomo (1996) provides a historical analysis of woman's roles in political change in Kenya, documenting key resistance movements such as the Mau Mau and the 1992 mother of political prisoners. She concludes that women, while often overlooked in mainstream narratives have played consistent roles in resisting oppression through non institutional forms such as maternal authority. It is however important to observe that, Nzomo does not capture the shift of resistance to non-conventional means such as digital resistance.

Similarly, Nasimiyu and Bosire (2021) also examines the rise of digital feminism in Kenya focusing on how women rights movements have adopted social media to mobilize against femicide, gender-based violence and discrimination. Their work demonstrates how online activism has become acceptable form of resistance. Admit-ably, their work is a trans-formative tool in applying digital platform for speaking against gender-based violence and other ills related to gender. Indeed, it addresses specific critical issues such as

stopping femicide. It is however important to observe that Nasimiyu and Bosire fails to-link this digital feminist activism to broader national economic resistance like that of the finance bill 2024.

According to Amnesty International (2024) the youth protest the 2024 finance bill had a non-traditional approach. Thus, the youths took placards, bots, and coordinated streets actions as a new form of political resistance as one appreciates this report in highlighting the nature of youth resistance in the digital error, it lacks one thing: scholarly analysis on the role of the gender in the resistance.

Crenshaw (1989) on his part analyses women participation in the protests using a theory he calls intersectionality theory where he suggested that, in a protest, women face unique challenges such as gender-based violence which shape their motivation and forms of resistance. While this theory may be useful in explaining the challenges that women face when participating in protest, it fails to explain the reasons they take part in such protests and their unique role in the protest.

Apart from these, Mutai and kinoti (2021) give an analysis of political mobilization of youth in Kenya. In this study, they identify structural marginalization and state repression as the key factors that provoke youth to protest.   Whereas this theory provides a critical foundation for understanding conditions that compel youths to protest, it does not examine gender specific grievances and roles in such protest especially roles that touches on women. Furthermore, it fails to appreciate the role of digital space in such protests but rather lays emphasis on traditional approach characteristic by physical demonstrations.

Akach (2022) provides a critical analysis of the budget- making process in Kenya, arguing that it systematically excludes marginalized population including youth and women. Akech's argument officers a deep policy analysis of democratic deficits in public finance management. He does not, however, explore responses to exclusion through protest or gender- specific perspectives especially digital resistance.

Kamau (2023) explores how Kenyan feminist use digital tools and hashtags to organize and amplify their cause, offering insight into online activism. His argument   provides a strong analysis of digital feminism. He, however, does not provide any clue on Gen-Z or economic resistance like the Finance Bill protest.

In conclusion, from all the reviewed literature, there is tends to be an agreement that youth and women in Kenya have been important actors in civic resistance, showcasing how the youth have constantly challenged oppressive policies and regimes through organizing both physical street demonstration and digital resistance. Its however important to observe that no study has explicitly examined the role of women in digital resistance particularly Gen- Z resistance. This study therefore intends to fill this gap by analyzing the critical causes of Gen-Z resistance and examining the role played by women in digital mobilization and street resistance.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized African feminist political theory commonly referred to as Afro-feminism. The theory was propagated by African scholars such as Oyeronke Oyeweni, Amina Mama, Malara Ogundipe-Leslie and Akasua Adomako Ampofo. According to these scholars, African women have historically been active agents in political and social change rather than passive victims of patriarchal system. They challenged the assumptions of western feminism which often failed to recognize the complex intersection of gender with colonialism, class race, age and socio-political structures in African contexts (Musingafi, M etal, 2024).

The core argument of this theory is that African Women's political engagement and resistance must be understood within a specific cultural and historical environment in which they operate. It further holds that, African women mobilize both through traditional and contemporary forms of resistance with appropriate tool according to societal age. The traditional tools ranged from storytelling, music and proverbs. In this study, the argument was that the women leveraged on the social media platforms such as TikTok, X (Formerly Twiter), Instagram and whatsapp to mobilize and make their voices heard, combined with the street protests. Most importantly, the theory provided the research with analytical lenses through which the women participation in the protest as front-line leaders could be properly understood. To this end, this theory therefore provided a useful basis upon which the role of women in Gen-Z protest could be properly analyzed.

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate the roles of Kenyan women in the Gen-Z protest movement against the 2024 finance Bill. It details the refresh design, population and sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations observed through the study.

Research Design

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research design. This mixed approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomenon within their real - life context. This being a historical inquiry, the emphasis was on qualitative design grounded on oral testimonies, focus group discussion and secondary sources to collect and analyse data. However quantitative was selectively employed to rain-force qualitative findings. The 2024-2025 protests were unprecedented in their scale, digital organization and gender dynamics warranting a design that could capture both individual narrative and collective behaviors which this design provided. The design enabled the researcher to focus on the protest against the 2024 finance bill while examining the roles, motivations, and impacts of women participants in their social political contexts.

Target Population

The primary targeted population for this study comprised young Kenyan women aged 18to 35 who actively participated in the 2024 protests against the finance bill. these women were involved either through physical presence in the demonstrations particularly in the urban centers such as Nairobi or through digital activism. Their online engagement was visible across all platforms like X (Formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram, whether they shared protest contents, mobilized peers and challenged government narratives. Their central role in both organizing and participating in the movement made them a critical group for understanding women's agency within the Gen-Z led political activism.

The second group of people were women led civil society organizers and digital influencers who played a significant role in shaping the direction and tone of the protest movement. These women were involved in organizing logistics, fundraising, producing educational contents and promoting messages across various online platforms. Their leadership both on the ground and online offered insight into the strategies women employed to mobilize and sustain public interest in the protest.

The third group comprised journalists, activists and policy analysts who observed, reported on, or analyzed the protest events through a gendered or political lens. These individuals contributed to the broader discourse around the protests and helped document the role women played in shaping both physical and digital protest landscapes.

 These population was selected based on their active involvement, visibility, and influence during the protest events. They provided diverse yet complementary perspectives that were essential for capturing a holistic picture of women's participation in the 2024 -2025 Gen-Z protest movement in Kenya.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted a purposive sampling method to identify participants who had first-hand information and significant insight into the protests. This non-probability sampling was most appropriate for selecting individuals who could provide rich, relevant and diverse information. To ensure variation and representation within the sample, the sampling was based on geographical location, mode of protest (online or physical) and social role such as activist, organizer, content creator or protester.

Data Collection Methods

A variety of data collection methods were employed:

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their motivations, experiences and perceptions of their roles in the protests. These interviews provided a critical understanding of the leadership and gender roles in the protests.

Digital Ethnography

Given the centrality of social media in the protests, digital ethnography was used to analyse women's participation in online spaces. This included reviewing posts, hashtag, video contents, live streams and comments from platforms such as tik Tok, X, face-book and You Tube.

Document and Media Analysis

A variety of documents such as blog posts, government press release and civil society briefings were reviewed to triangulate the data and track the timeline of the event, policy-response and public discourse around women's involvement

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data collected from both primary and secondary sources was analyzed qualitatively and presented in a narrative form.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered strictly to established ethical principles to safeguard the rights of the participants. All the correspondents were fully briefed on the purpose and the scope of the study and that research was purely for academic reasons. The participants were also encouraged to voluntarily provide informed consent to participate in the research process. To protect the identity of the informants, the confidentiality of their information was maintained throughout their research process.

Research Findings

Introduction

This section presents the research findings on the role of women in the Gen-Z protest in Kenya (2024-2025) the findings begin by highlight the compelling reasons that led to the uprising. It goes ahead to discuss the diverse ways in which the women participated in, shaped, and sustained the protests, both online and on the street. The section then extensively explores critical roles played by women in this resistance. drawing from the interviews, media reports, and digital content, the results deeply illustrate the role of women as organizers, care givers, digital mobilizers and front-line protesters. The section will further examine the challenges they faced including harassment, state repression, gender specific risks, while underscoring their resilience, innovation and contribution to the broadening civic engagement. These findings provide critical insight into how women participation, influenced the character, visibility, sustainability of the Gen-Z led movement in Kenya

The Reasons for the Rise of Gen- Z Protest in Kenya (2024-2025)

As earlier noted, Gen-Z uprising was a wave of youth- led protest that emerged in mid-2024 and continued into 2025, marking one of the most significant grass-root civil movements in the country's recent history. The Gen-Z broadly defined as young people born between late 19990s and early 2010s makes up the largest share of Kenyan population. As Kirui (2025) observes, they are digitally savvy, socially conscious, and less tied to traditional political and ethnic loyalties that have historically shaped Kenyan politics. The uprising that begun in June 2024 as a peaceful protest has been attributed to a variety of reasons.

The high cost of living and unpopular tax proposal has been cited as the major reason for the rise of Gen-Z led protest. According to quantitative analysis of the interviewed individuals, 75% of the interviewed individuals identified rising cost of living as their main reason for joining protests, while 62% specifically cited the proposed taxes on the basic commodities such as fuel, sanitary towels, internet access and bread as the main trigger for the protests. These findings agree with Twinomurinzi (2024) observation, that the finance bill 2024 proposed new higher taxes on widely used items and services such sanitary towels, fuel, internet access and other basic household items. This action was perceived as retrogressive at a time when households faced soaring prices. Oral testimony from protesters vividly illustrates this frustration as one female respondent laments; *"we are jobless or underpaid, yet the government wants us to pay more taxes for debts we did not create"*. (Achieng, personal communication, July 13th, 2024). Such sentiments were echoed across the focus group, where participants not only saw finance bill as a mare state policy but also a moral injustice. Indeed, many young people saw the bill shifting the burden onto the ordinary citizens to service public debt. Indeed, to the Gen-Zs, the tax proposals disproportionately affected the ordinary citizens, particularly the youths who forms the majority of Kenya's unemployed population. The young people felt doubly marginalized; they were excluded from meaningful economic opportunities yet asked to shoulder the burden of government debts repayment and fiscal deficits through increased taxation. This created a sense of economic injustice where poor and struggling middle class were being overtaxed to sustain what they saw as elite corruption and wastage. As such, what was framed as a technical measure to raise revenue was seen by the youth as a direct assault on their survival and aspirations. Ultimately, the cost-of-living crisis and taxation debates transformed into a moral and generation question, why should the young people bear the cost of debts they did not create while the political class that created the debt enjoy

privileges with impunity. This became an engine that drove Gen-Z uprising making it more than a protest against a single bill but confrontation with the structural roots of Kenya's governance crisis (Nyagaka,2025).

According to Kirui, (2025) the Gen-Z protest cannot be understood without examining the role of the police brutality, abductions, and entrenched impunity in state response. He argues that though the protest was initially triggered by grievances on the high cost of living and unpopular tax proposal, the protest excelled when security forces resorted to excessive violence in handling demonstrators. In Nairobi CBD particularly around the parliament area, the police reportedly used live bullets, rubber rounds, and tear gas against unarmed peaceful protesters resulting to numerous death and injuries. These actions resulted to more protests in the following days. This assertion is supported by the views of the respondents who participated in the demonstration, out of 50 people interviewed, 62% reported that police brutality either motivated them to join the protest or intensify their participation. The interview further revealed that the use of excessive force particularly in Nairobi Central District CBD) marked a turning point as one respondent remarked: "*when we saw the young people being beaten and shot near parliament, staying silent was no-longer an option we had to retaliate*" (Anonymous respondent, personal communication, 15th July 2024).

Alongside police lethal force, a police abdication of innocent citizens and activists also informed Gen-z demonstrations. Plain clothes officers in unmarked vehicles seized suspected protest mobilizers at night, detaining them in undisclosed locations without charge. Case example was abduction of a writer Gabriel Oguda. This was circulated widely on social media transforming fear into mobilization. Such-enforced disappearance fueled protests in Nairobi. It was made worse by perceived culture of impunity within the state officers. For instance, despite abundant video evidence and eye witnessed testimonies, a few officers were held accountable. To the young Kenyans this lack of justice left them with no option but to resort to the street (Nyagaka,2025). Another reason for the protests was the growing mistrust of political elite and government spending priorities. The protesters accused leaders of hypocrisy, pointing to extravagant perks for the top officials and new budget allocations for the office of the first lady and the second lady at a time when austerity measures were being imposed on ordinary citizens. This is revealed by data from the study where 68% of the respondents expressed deep mistrust towards political leaders and government spending priorities. Most respondents perceived it as the highest form of hypocrisy where leaders allocated themselves hefty packs while imposing hostility measures on the ordinary helpless citizens. In explaining this one anonymous respondent remarked; *they tell us to tighten our belts while they expand their offices, benefits and salaries. Some visibly live large beyond their income.* (V. Oduya personal communication, July 2025). For the Gen-Zs, this was proof that the political class cared more about personal benefits than about the struggles of the population. Although the government later announced spending cuts, these were interpreted as public relations cosmetics rather than genuine reforms further fueling the protests.

The structure of the Kenyan population also played role in the emergence of Gen-Z protests. Quantitative analysis indicated that 65% of the respondents were either unemployed or engaged in informal insecure employment. Musya (2025) notes that the country has a large youth demographic, yet opportunities for quality employment are limited creating a feeling of lost aspiration and dreams. This view is reinforced by oral testimonies from participants where most respondent laments that the hustler economy has failed to honor its promises, one respondent explains; "*we were promised secure and better job opportunity by hustler regime, but what we get is struggle and debt.*" (Anonymous respondent, personal communication

July 15th, 2024). This mismatch between rising aspirations fueled by education, digital exposure, and government promises of a hustle economy, and the harsh reality of limited prospects created a sense of betrayal. Indeed, the 2024 finance bill simply became the trigger that brought the peeper frustration to the surface.

The collapse of traditional mediating institutions is another factor. The opposition parties, once natural outlets for popular grievances, were seen as compromised or unwilling to take the risk. This vacuum allowed young people to step in as independent actors rejecting elite driven dialogue and insisting on direct accountability. By refusing to be represented by political or civil society elites, the Gen-Z reinforced their image as a generation unwilling to be c-opted.

Nyagaka (2025), on his part looks at the rise of Gen-Z protest on account of fairness, justice and representation. The protesters made it clear that they were not opposed to taxation, but to unfair system where the poor pay more while leaders enjoy privileges. By framing their struggle as defense against institutional values, they transformed what began as a reaction to a finance bill into a broader generational demand for accountability and democratic reforms

 In conclusion, the Gen-Z protest in Kenya were not just about a single piece of legislation otherwise known as finance bill 2024 but were the outcome of a combination of structural and political factors. Rising cost of living, elite mistrust, youth unemployment, digital mobilization, state violence, weak opposition and strong moral narrative all converge to produce one of the most significant youth- led movement in Kenya's recent history. Indeed, the protest signaled arrival of a digitally savvy, politically conscious generation unwilling to accept governance that ignores their struggle and rights.

The Role of Women in the Gen-Z Protests in Kenya

Historically, women in Kenya have been marginalized in the formal political spaces, their participation have been framed by patriarchal structures and cultural constrains. However, the Gen-Z protests disrupted this pattern offering women platform not only to voice their grievances but also to assert leadership, solidarity and creativity in the resistance. Their involvement went beyond passive support role to encompass front-line mobilization.

As Kirui, (2025) observes, one of the critical roles undertaken by the women was digital mobilization and agenda setting. He argues that women played a leading role in online activism especially through platforms such as X (formerly Twittter), TikTok, and Instagram. In these platforms, female content creators, journalists and activists generated viral contents that mobilized   youths, exposed state brutality and shaped the movement's discourse. Their voices amplified the protests message, demonstrating how women in the digital spaces can drive collective action and challenge state narrative. Women influencers for instance spearheaded hashtag movements such as #RejectFinaceBill 2024, #occupyparliament and #EndpoliceBrutality. This contribution is further reinforced by oral testimonies of women who directly participated in the protest. One female protester explained that "*most of the information about where to gather, when to move and how to stay safe was shared by women online. We were constantly posting updates and correcting miss-information spreading as a result of propaganda from the government*" (V. Oduya personal communication, July 2025). In a similar vein, participants in a focus group discussion emphasis that women dominated protest related to online spaces, especially on X and TikTok. She observes: "*If you checked the trending hashtags, it was mostly women pushing   the conversation and*

reminding people why where protesting." (focus group discussion with women protesters Nairobi, July, 2024). Indeed, according to content analysis of protest related posts, an estimate of 60% of the high engagement content were generated by the women, indicating their central role in agenda setting and digital mobilization. By consistently generating and amplifying hashtags, women ensured that the protests related contents trended nationally and internationally. This digital visibility pressurized political leaders to and attracted global solidarity making protest difficult to ignore.

Apart from these women occupied physical spaces of protests with remarkable bravery. They joined street demonstration, leading chants, providing direction and challenged state security forces with nonviolent courage.   Indeed, Onduko, (2025) observes that, their presence and courage disrupted traditional gender stereotypes that often-confined women to the private sphere, stead placing them in the pick of political action.

Additionally, women played a critical role in the community care within the movement. According to Ingutia, (2025) they coordinated medical aid, food and safe housing for the protesters. In moments of repression, women organized solidarity chains. They were also called to support the families of the arrested, injured or killed. This view is further supported by oral testimonies as expounded by one of the protest participants; "*when people were injured or arrested, women were the ones who mostly organized food, first aid and a place to hide. Without that support many people would have feared coming*". (V. Oduya personal communication, July,2025). In other words, women organized volunteer groups of nurses, doctors, and first aides who were stationed near protest hot spots to respond quickly to casualties as revealed in this oral testimony; "*after the violence many protesters were traumatized. In response, women in collaboration with a few men created spaces where we could talk cry and encourage each other to continue*". (Focus group discussion with women protesters, 12th May,2025). These women-led welfare networks supported hundreds of protesters daily, demonstrating the care work was not peripheral but structurally central in sustaining the movement. This care infrastructure sustained the momentum remained people centered. Similarly, the brutality faced by many protesters ranging from arrests to injuries and trauma of witnessing violence demanded emotional care. Women provided counselling comfort, and solidarity circles that helped protesters process grief and fear collectively. This emotional resilient building was critical in maintaining morale and ensuring that the protest spirit was not broken. In certain instances, the woman organized fund raising campaigns both online and offline to help cover hospital bills, bail costs, and funeral expenses. By doing so they kept the broader community connected to the movement ensuring that their families and victims do not face isolation

Besides, women acted as cultural and moral symbols of resistance. Ingutia, (2025) notes that women challenged patriarchy not only in the state but also within the protest spaces demanding that the Gen-Z movement embody exclusivity, gender equality, respect. Their insistence on the equity on the equitable participation ensured that the struggle was not simply generational but also feminist in orientation. Further observes that, women particularly mothers, positioned themselves as the voices of morality and conscience in the protests. Their public cries: *don't kill our children* and *we are fighting for our children's features*, re-framed the demonstration from being youth driven unrest into a struggle for justice, dignity, and inter-generational survival. By invoking motherhood and care, women shamed the state for using violent against her own citizens thereby stripping the government moral legitimacy. Indeed, discourse analysis indicates

that moral framing appeared in nearly half of the protest messages, largely driven by women's narratives centered on dignity and inter-generational justice.

Unlike past political movement in Kenya that were dominated by male figures, the Gen-Z movement saw women take center stage. Onduko, O. (2025) for instance observe that, young women organized rallies, leading chants, and coordinated protest logistics both online and the ground. He further adds that appropriately 40% of the protest participants were women reflecting a significant shift from earlier male dominated protests. According to Ann Njeri personal communication, July 15th 2024, the women were bold and vocal addressing crowds and media, clearly articulated demands of the youth. In doing so, the women positioned themselves as symbol of justice courage and hope in the protest. Indeed, some mothers and young women took to streets carrying placards or kneeling before the security forces which highlighted the moral weight of the struggle. This leadership re-framed the protest from being confrontational to being about human dignity. It further challenged traditional gender stereotypes often associated with women as weak and back setters.

Moreover, female lawyer, influencers and community leaders offered legal aid, documented abuses, and spoke on some national and international platforms. Their leadership extended their struggle from streets into policy debates, media spaces and courtrooms, giving protests institutional credibility, connecting grassroots activism to formal justice m mechanisms, making the movement more structured and impactful. Similarly, the women voices often framed the protest as a moral struggle rather than just a political a political push. Most mothers spoke about their children's future and young women demanded accountability, shaped the discourse around governance corruption and police brutality. This moral framing broadened support, drawing in people who might otherwise have remained neutral. It also shifted protests from being chaos to being understood as a fight for justice and dignity (Nyagaka, 2025).

Another critical role of women in Gen-Z movement was the provision of non-violence leadership. According to Onduko, (2025) women consistently emphasized the importance of peaceful demonstrations, even in the face of state repression. On social media for instance, women activists and influencers urged participants to avoid destruction of property or violence. Their messaging reminded protesters that non-violence carried moral strength and legitimacy. Making it harder for the state to dismiss or criminalize the movement. Unduko's view is supported by several oral testimonies as one participant observed; "*even when police provoked us women kept on reminding everyone that violence would be used against us. That peace was our strongest weapon.*" (C. Shiramba, May 12Th 2025). This kind of leadership reinforced discipline among protesters and ensured that the movement retained broad public sympathy. Besides, women women engaged in symbolic acts on non-violence that drew attention without confrontation for example mothers knelt down before the security officers or carrying placards with appeals, "*don't kill our children*" became powerful images of non-violent defiance. Indeed, some young women resorted to songs, prayers and slogan shift the protest atmosphere away from aggression. These gestures placed the state in morally vulnerable position, exposing the disproportionate use of force against peaceful citizens as alluded in this oral testimony; "*kneeling was not a sign of weakness but rather it was a way of showing that the state was the one acting without humanity*". (Anonymous female protester, personal information, October 15th, 2024).

In conclusion, women played an important role in shaping the character, resilience, and legitimacy of the Gen-Z resistance. Far from being passive participants, they were mobilizers, caregivers, advocates, moral voices, and strategic leaders who ensured that the movement was both inclusive and sustainable. Their

leadership manifested in multiple spheres, they mobilized through platforms, organized care networks on the ground, provided legal and professional advocacy and most importantly served as cultural and moral symbols of justice. In other words, the involvement of women in the Gen-Z protest in Kenya transformed the movement into more than just a political outcry; they made it a call for justice, equity and inclusive governance. Their presence expanded the narrative from just economic dissatisfaction to a broader critique of systematic inequality. Indeed, the non-violent strategies women championed gave the resistance credibility and moral weight, drawing sympathy from both local and international audiences. Yes, their role was not just important, it was indispensable.

Challenges Faced by the Kenyan Women During Gen-Z Protest

Kenyan women played a central role in the Gen-Z protests, yet their activism was not without significant challenges. As they pushed for accountability, justice and democratic reforms, women protest faced complex set of obstacles shaped by both the state repression and entrenched patriarchal structures. Their experiences revealed how gendered vulnerabilities interact with political resistance, creating unique difficulties for women activists.

One of the most pressing challenges was gendered harassment and violence. As Omweri (2024) observes, women protestants were subjected not only to the teargas, arrests, and brutality that all demonstrators faced but also sexual harassment, intimidation, and gender - based insults. Security forces and hostile actors frequently weaponized women bodies as a means of silencing dissent. This is confirmed in the oral testimony of one of the female protesters; "*The police did not just want to disperse us. They insulted us as women and threatened us sexually. That fear stayed in us even after leaving the streets.*" Anonymous female protester, personal communication, June 15th, 2025. Focus group discussion further revealed that 80 % of the women participants perceived gender-based threat as a distinct risk to women participation: almost every woman here feared arrest not just because of jail but because of what could happen to us as women inside the prison or cells. (Focus group discussion with women protesters, Nairobi, September 2024). This reality meant that women endured double risks: the dangers of political repression alongside gender specific forms of violence and intimidation.

The online spaces that facilitated Gen-Z mobilization also exposed women to cybersex harassment. Female activists, influencers, and journalists who used social media to rally support or document abuses became the frequent targets of trolling, slut- shaming, and misogynistic attacks. Unlike their male counterparts who were criticized primarily for their political positions, women's personal lives and morality were often dragged into the public spotlight to discredit their activism. This mirrored the broader reality that digital platforms produce offline gender inequalities, making it difficult for women to exercise leadership without gender assassination (Muriithi, & Shihundu, 2024).

Another major challenge was marginalization within protest leadership itself. While women were at the forefront of mobilization, caregivers, and advocacy, their contribution were often undervalued or overlooked. Media coverage and public narratives tended to highlight male voices in the street confrontation, while women roles were framed as supportive or symbolic. These dynamic reflected deep seated patriarchal tendencies that undervalue women's leadership even when their actions sustained movement (Onduko, (2025).

At the same time, many women protesters struggled to balance activism with social expectations tied to gender roles. According to Musya (2025), cultural norms often demanded that women remain within domestic or care-giving spaces, and young women's participation in the protest was sometimes seen as rebellion against tradition. Mothers in-particular, faced pressure to prioritize family responsibilities over political involvement. One mother who participated in the protest noted; "*I was asked, who was cooking for children while I protested. No one ever asked men such question.*" Anonymous mother protester, personal communication, July 20th, 2025. Focus group data indicated that a significant portion of women protesters faced family or community resistance against participation in the protest. These societal judgments created additional burdens, forcing women to justify their presence in the resistance in ways that men rarely had to.

Women also faced the same brutality from the state as men, but with an added layer of vulnerability. Beyond the physical dangers of police beatings, arrest, or tear gas, women endured the constant fear of sexual assault or stigmatization if detained such fears poses serious psychological risks as one participants observed; "*even the idea of being arrested was terrifying because as a woman, you do not know what such heartless police officers would do to you*". (Anonymous female protestor July 15th, 2024). Nyagaka (2025) notes that, such fears had a deterrent effect on women participation. Indeed, focus group discussion estimated that fear of sexual violence was one of the major reasons why women temporarily withdrew from front-line protests.

Furthermore, women confronted practical barrier such as limited access to resources and platforms. Many women from the rural or economically marginalized backgrounds lacked smart phones, stable internet connection, or financial means to sustain activism. As a result, their voices were not amplified compared to urban, middle-class women with access to digital spaces. This digital divide reflected broader structural inequalities within Kenyan society, which meant that while some women would lead online resistance others remained excluded or unheard (Omweri, 2024).

Finally, women activists often contended with patriarchal backlash and decriminalization. Their voices were frequently dismissed as emotional, misguided, or manipulated by men. In some cases, they were accused of seeking attention rather than advancing genuine political demands. This is well elaborated in the words of a young women activist; "*we were being told that we were chasing clout or just being used. It was a way of telling us we don't belong to the politics*" Anonymous female protester, May 12th, 2025. Such narratives served to trivialize women's political agency and reinforced stereotypes that politics and resistance are male domains. This backslash was not new; it echoed historical patterns where women's involvement in resistance movements was acknowledged symbolically but rarely valued substantively.

In conclusion, Kenyan women in the Gen-Z protests confronted a web of interacted challenges that sought to undermine their activism. From state violence and online harassment to patriarchal marginalization and resource inequalities, they faced obstacles that were both structured and gender specific. Yet, despite these hurdles, women's contributions were crucial in sustaining the movement, shaping its moral narrative and expanding its reach. Their persistence underscored that the struggle was not only against unjust policies but also against cultural and gender barrier that have histrionically excluded women from political spaces. By enduring and resisting these challenges, women broadened the meaning of Gen-Z movement, showing that true resistance involves fighting for justice while also dismantling the system of gender oppression.

Conclusion And Recommendation

Conclusion

The Gen-Z protest in Kenya marked a turning point in the country's civic and political consciousness, with women emerging as critical actors in shaping the trajectory of the movement. The resistance was fundamentally driven by frustration over corruption, unemployment, oppressive tax regime, economic exclusion and a sense of betrayal by political elites who disregarded the aspirations of the young people. For many women the struggle was also personal for they bore the brunt of systematic inequalities raging from economic marginalization to gender discrimination that made the political status quo unsustainable. Their resistance was therefore motivated by both shared grievances of their generation and the nique challenges they experience as women.

Within the resistance, the women played multifaceted and indispensable roles. They were mobilizers, amplifying the cause through digital activism and organizing grassroots networks. Their advocacy extended beyond streets as they engaged in media discourse, legal defense, and international solidarity campaigns thereby broadening the legitimacy and the visibility of the Gen-z movement. Yet despite their contributions, women participants faced untold challenges, ranging from misogynistic attack that sought to delegitimize their activism by targeting their gender and morality to structural patriarchy which often reduced their visibility, overshadowing their leadership with narrative centered on men.

In essence, the role of women in the Gen-Z protest revealed a paradox: they were simultaneously central to the movement's moral and organization's strength yet marginalized in its recognition and representation. Their involvement not only shaped the resistance but also exposed the persistent gender inequalities that must be addressed if Kenya is to achieve inclusive democracy and social justice.

Recommendations

To strengthen the impact of women's participation in the future civic struggle a number of commendations were made from this study. First, there is need for deliberate recognition of women's leadership in protest movement. Recognizing women as central actors rather than supportive figures would ensure that their influence is institutionalized and valued.

Equally important is the establishment of gender - sensitive protection mechanisms. Women protesters often face unique challenges such as harassment, gender-based violence and misogynistic attacks that undermine their participation. The state should therefore design strategies that prioritize women's safety in both physical and digital spaces. Since much of the Gen-Z mobilization relied on digital mobilization, enhancing digital safety for women becomes critical.

Moreover, inclusive engagement in policy marking is essential. The young people should be included in dialogue aimed at addressing their governance problems, employment, inequality, and economic reforms. Their lived experiences offer valuable insights into the intersection between gender and generational grievances., making their involvement vital for meaningful change.

Finally, address deep rooted patriarchal attitudes which often limit women participation in resistance. Community dialogue campaigns and educational activities should also be used to challenge these biases to create a cultural shift where women's activism is respected rather than stigmatized. Addressing these

overlapping inequalities will ensure that resistance movement remain inclusive, representative, and transformative.

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APPENDIX A: List of Oral Respondents and Focus Group Discussion

A. Individual Oral Interview

1. Achieng, J. Young woman protester and digital activist, Nairobi. (Personal communication, July 13th, 2024)

2. Njeri, A. A young woman protester and digital content creator (personal communication, July 15th 2024

3. Shiramba C. A young Woman Protester, (Personal Communication, May 12Th 2025)

4. Mother protester (Anonymous) A parent protesting against police brutality, Nairobi. (Personal communication, October 15th, 2024.).

5. A young lady protester (Anonymous). A protester and digital activist, Nairobi. (Personal communication, July 15th 2024)

6. A mother (anonymous). A protester against high cost of living, Nairobi (Personal communication, September 12th, 2024)

B. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

1. Focus group Discussion, Nairobi**:** Youth protesters and women activists. Conducted in July 2024

2. Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) Nairobi: Youth participants in Gen-Z protest. Conducted in Nairobi, September 2024).

3. Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)Nairobi: Community members involved in the protest. Conducted on 12th May,2025

4. Focus Group Discussion, Nairobi. Youth protestors and women activists. Conducted in July, 2024