

# Young Zimbabweans are using YouTube to ridicule politicians and educate voters

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As Zimbabwe holds its 2023 elections, young creatives are taking to social media like YouTube to discuss politics and to create comic spoofs and critiques that speak back to the country's autocratic government.



Source: [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

One notable social commentator is Taffy Theman (Tafadzwa Ngubozabo), who hosts a popular YouTube channel that uses comedy, music and a mock news studio to parody the powers that be. Another is youth media platform Bustop TV, which offers skits, animation and talk shows to express views on social issues in the country. Magamba TV, meanwhile, creates scathing political satires about politicians.

Like other countries in Africa, Zimbabwe is a youthful nation. Over 65% of the population are believed to be below the age of 35. Yet, Zimbabwe's youth have been the most affected by the country's exclusionary politics and marginalisation by an aging government. Of the 210 members of parliament elected in the previous polls in 2018, only five were under 35. Young Zimbabweans have also been violently harassed and have been victims of political patronage and electoral manipulation, sometimes being used as agents of political violence.

Despite this, new social media platforms are being created by young people who use comedy and satire for political dissent and to caricature political leaders. Young people have also made use of these platforms to express their views on the elections, take part in voter education and encourage each other to vote.

As a lecturer in English literary and cultural studies, I have focused much of my research on popular culture, youth culture, music and social media for political protest in Zimbabwe. I recently delivered a conference paper on urban youth cultural activism in the social media age.

It's my view that the digital era – and YouTube in particular – is offering new opportunities for young people to engage in debate despite the suppression of dissenting voices in Zimbabwe. This signals the effectiveness of the internet and social media as instruments of political activism.

### **The youth vote**

Elections have failed to bring transformation, especially to the lives of young Zimbabweans living at the margins of the country's collapsing economy. This has contributed to political apathy among the youth.



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The 2013 elections saw only 8% of eligible Zimbabweans under 30 registering to vote in a poll characterised by violence.

But 2017 saw the fall of Robert Mugabe in a coup after 37 years in power.

The 2018 elections witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of young people registered to vote. The number of urban youth who registered rose by 77% due to factors such as the “pre-election peaceful environment, youth-to-youth mobilisation, the hope of a new dispensation, civic education” and others.

But the polls were followed by post-election violence which led to the death of at least six people at the hands of the army. The ruling Zanu-PF party was now entrenched under the leadership of Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Yet, once again, a substantial number of young Zimbabweans are participating in 2023. About 65% of those aged 18-25 and 86% of those aged 26-35 registered to vote.

### **Social media use**

In my research I've argued that due to exclusionary politics young Zimbabweans, especially the urban youth, have turned to popular culture and social media. Not only for entertainment and comic relief, but also as a means of political expression.

However, there have been debates among scholars about how effective social media can be as a tool for the expression of political dissent. Some critics, like Zimbabwean activist and journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, have gone as far as berating the "unfocused youth" for their nonchalant attitude on social media towards meaningful political issues.

Yet in the past years a growing number of online content producers have emerged with incisive political commentary. And comedians and musicians in particular have raised their voices, sometimes becoming victims of government repression, arrests and torture.

### **Taffy Theman**

The 33-year-old Australia-based Zimbabwean YouTuber and comedian Taffy Theman uses mainly parody and satire to offer commentary on Zimbabwean politics. He releases videos that range from spoof songs to a news studio that analyses developments among the ruling elite.

In a recent video called *The Political History of Zimbabwe from Cecil John Rhodes to Mnangagwa*, he is of the view that Zimbabwe is headed towards another disputed election due to enduring electoral flaws. He traces a history of Zimbabwe's political problems from the colonial period to the present. In another he uses a speech by Mnangagwa to create a spoof song that highlights the president's lack of oratory skills and the intellectual bankruptcy that characterises his speeches.

## **Bustop TV and Magamba TV**

Bustop TV and Magamba TV are social media houses that feature young people who use social media, comedy and satire for political dissent and to caricature political leaders.



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Between them they have offered critiques of political intimidation and vote buying. They have addressed the issue of young Zimbabweans used as political pawns by the ruling party and the manipulation of the electoral process. They've also tackled the empty campaign promises from political leaders from both the ruling elite and the opposition.

Bustop TV has also gathered young Zimbabweans to hear their views on the 2023 elections, creating *The People's Bus*, a talk show format. These views have included support for the ruling party.

## **Change and hope**

Watching the YouTube content of these creators, it's evident that many young people are fed up with Zimbabwe's politicians, the lack of transformation and the stagnancy of the country's electoral processes.

Despite this, some young voters express a belief that change is still possible and that young Zimbabweans have a responsibility to participate in elections to bring about that change.

Despite their scathing portrayals, the new social media creators discussed here have maintained a vigorous optimism, urging young Zimbabweans to register to vote or arguing for them to vote for change.

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