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By Alexander Noyes

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Zimbabwe's First Lady Grace Mugabe dances at a rally in Harare, Thursday, November 19, 2015. At the rally, held in a poor neighborhood in the capital, she told supporters she was skipping some of her meals to empathize with Zimbabweans who could only afford to have one meal a day. The first lady also dismissed claims that she plans to succeed her husband when his term ends in 2018. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

Alexander Noyes is an Adjunct Research Associate in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

STUDENT ACTIVISM AND THE COST OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

In mid-October, student protests broke out on several university campuses across South Africa over an anticipated tuition hike. The protests, with a few [exceptions](#) largely peaceful, ultimately resulted in acquiescence by the government and a promise by President Jacob Zuma that there would be [no tuition increase in 2016](#). Why were the protesters successful and how responsive is the government to its youngest voters? [more...](#)



Photo by the author taken in December 2015 of the base of the former monument to Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town that was removed from campus in April 2015.

Stephanie M. Burchard is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses. Her new book, [Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences](#), is available now.

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ZANU-PF's Succession Saga

As highlighted in [previous editions](#) of *Africa Watch*, a fierce succession struggle within ZANU-PF has been playing out over the past several years in Zimbabwe. Before the 2014 party congress, the main protagonists of the battle were Mujuru and current Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, a longtime party loyalist who has held a number of positions, including justice and defense minister. Grace, a political novice until last year, when she became secretary of the ZANU-PF women's league, played a major role in bringing down Mujuru by sharply [attacking](#) her at rallies around the country for [allegedly](#) attempting to overthrow President Mugabe. Since Mujuru's expulsion, Mnangagwa has been seen as the leader of the pack in the contest to replace Mugabe. But the position of frontrunner to take over from Mugabe is a precarious one to hold in Zimbabwe, as the 91-year-old has a long history of keeping both his allies and opponents guessing over who will eventually succeed him.

Mnangagwa vs. Grace?

Reports [allege](#) that a faction within ZANU-PF aligned with Grace is plotting to have her replace Mnangagwa as party vice president at the upcoming congress. President Mugabe is allegedly on board with the proposal. According to *Africa Confidential*, the alleged [plan](#) is for Grace's allies to call for the restoration of a women's quota at the highest ranks of the party and then propose Grace as the natural candidate to fill the shoes of Mnangagwa who would be ordered to step down into a less prominent party position. The thinking goes that Grace would then be in a prime position to take over from her husband. Grace has publicly hinted about bad blood with the Mnangagwa camp, [saying](#) in August of this year, "We know they have been mobilizing since 2013 claiming they want to take over from President Mugabe. But let me warn you. When you are asked to act it does not mean you have been anointed heir apparent. Be patient."

Grace has made contradictory statements about her own political ambitions. Last year, she left the door open to running for [president](#): "Some say I want to be president. Why not? Am I not Zimbabwean, too?" But last month she suggested that she has [no aspirations to rule](#): "I am standing here as the wife of our President and as someone whom you chose to lead the women. I am ending here and I don't need another position." Despite her public statement, Grace's recent high-profile rallies around the country have convinced Zimbabwean analysts that she is readying a run at higher political office. Dewa Mavhinga of Human Rights Watch [argues](#), "Whoever says there is no bigger plan behind Grace's whirlwind campaigns across the country is lying with a straight face. This could very well be the establishment of a Mugabe dynasty, if the people of Zimbabwe allow it." Some opposition members are convinced that Grace is already calling the shots behind the scenes



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for the elderly Mugabe. Former finance minister Tendai Biti [says](#) that Grace “is the de facto leader of government. . . Now she is looking for de jure power and Mugabe has no power to stop her.”

Conclusion

While Grace’s recent political maneuverings suggest that she is looking to move up in the ranks of ZANU-PF, her chances of taking over for Mugabe after he departs the political scene seem modest. This is due to three main factors. First, it is unlikely Mnangagwa would go down without a fight, and he has strong [backing](#) from Zimbabwe’s influential military chiefs. Second, Grace has no real political or governing experience and no liberation war credentials to help her build a popular support base. Her critics [call](#) her “Gucci Grace” because of her penchant for lavish shopping trips abroad. A ZANU-PF insider recently [commented](#) that she is “clueless in terms of statecraft.” Grace would have a hard time commanding grassroots or elite-level support independently of her husband.

Finally, and perhaps most important, her ascendancy within ZANU-PF of late is entirely dependent on Mugabe’s largesse and still firm grip on the party. As [noted](#) by political commentator Alex Magaisa, Grace “is not an emerging center of power, since her power derives from and is inextricably tied to her husband’s.” If Mugabe dies in office, Grace’s political ambitions would be all but buried along with him. Grace’s only real shot at becoming ZANU-PF’s candidate in the country’s 2018 elections would be if President Mugabe were to formally step down and hand the reins to her, while remaining in total control behind the scenes. She could then run as a proxy candidate for Mugabe. This scenario is unlikely given Mugabe’s advanced age and decades-long refusal to voluntarily give up power, but it remains a possibility.

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The Strength of Student Activists in South Africa

Student activism has a long and storied history in South Africa. From the [Soweto Uprising](#) over education inequality in the 1970s and the activism of Steve Biko, to the anti-apartheid protests of the [1980s](#) and more recently the [Rhodes Must Fall](#) movement earlier in 2015, students in South Africa have frequently taken to the streets to force their government to listen to them. Their concerns often revolve around issues of social and economic equality and justice. Additional issues include [underpaid support staff](#) and the [decolonization of education](#) in South Africa.

Fees Must Fall

Student protests began on October 14 at [Witwatersrand University](#) (Wits) in Johannesburg over a proposed [10.5 percent fee increase](#) for the 2016 school year, and they quickly spread to other universities. Using the hash tag #FeesMustFall, students from around the country, inspired by events at Wits, organized protests on their own campuses. Within a week of the initial protests, several schools, including the University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University, Rhodes University, and the University of Cape Town, were shut down by student protesters.

On October 23, more than 10,000 students marched to the parliament in Cape Town to force the government to listen to their demands. The government's response to the protests, although [initially muted](#), turned defensive as the police were called out in riot gear to repel the protesters, and then grew swiftly as the movement appeared to gain traction. Ultimately, President Jacob Zuma and administrators from several universities met with the students and agreed to not raise fees in 2016. Although some celebrated this concession as a victory, others believed that the government's decision [did not go far enough](#). The protests mostly ceased, and students returned to campuses to resume taking finals and preparing for the end of the semester.

The government's quick capitulation perhaps reflected its own ineffectiveness in addressing social and economic problems. Economic inequality has remained a persistent and troubling trend in South Africa. It is estimated that in terms of [access to education](#) and economic opportunities, post-apartheid South Africa is [performing worse](#) in many ways than the previous regime. Despite comprising less than 10 percent of the total population, whites in South Africa [overwhelmingly](#) make up the professorial pool at the university level. In addition, although their enrollment levels are up, black and colored students are [significantly less likely](#) than their white counterparts to graduate from universities.

The government may also be trying to appear responsive to the needs of the next generation of voters as a way to bring them into the party. There was much initial enthusiasm for the 2014 elections, as they represented the first chance the "born frees"—those born after the end of apartheid in South Africa—could cast their ballots. Both [registration](#) and [turnout](#) for the 18 to 24 age group were lower than expected, however. Perhaps to improve its relationship with this cohort, the ANC has



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seemingly offered Wits Student Representative Council president [Nompendulo Mkatshwa](#) a research position within the party, but the offer has led many to criticize her and her role in the movement.

Conclusion

The lack of inclusivity of higher education and the cost of higher education, already [out of reach](#) for the majority of South Africans, still loom large in South Africa. In early December, new pro-student graffiti appeared on the University of Cape Town campus, suggesting that the demands of the students have not yet been completely addressed. The proposed fee hikes have only been postponed. It is possible protests will resume next year in light of the government's inability to reconcile its post-apartheid promise with current levels of educational inequality.

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