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The Responsibility to Protect and the Youth: A Case Study of the Youth Activism in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) as a new international intervention norm for human protection entails the reconceptualisation of state sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a right. The R2P norm has its conceptual genesis in Africa and the fact that its principles have been embraced by the African Union's (AU) Constitutive Act is indicative of the fact that Africa is a stakeholder in the entire debate. Africa also happens to host a disproportionate share of global humanitarian crises, and has a relatively younger population than anywhere else in the world. Young people are particularly vulnerable in conflict situations owing to their common socio-economic vulnerability. There is compelling evidence to demonstrate that African youth are targeted and exploited to participate directly or indirectly in armed conflicts and other politically motivated violence. By adopting a case based approach of the Zimbabwe youth militia, this paper examines the African stake in R2P, specifically through the prism of its young and vulnerable population. The paper posits that youth experiences in Zimbabwe show that they are co-opted as agents for destructive engagement and to commit atrocities. By introducing the subject of youth in the R2P debate, this study contributes to the discourse of responsible leadership among youth. It is the contention of this paper that the young and vulnerable are the ones deserving to be beneficiaries of R2P and need to be oriented on the norm and its underlying principles so that the next generation of Africa's leaders will be R2P-smart.