

Policy Conversation: To Protest or Not to Protest?

Youth Lab, in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Student Labs Wits, invite you to the first Policy Conversation of 2016.

BACKGROUND:

The #FeesMustFall protest was sparked by an announcement in October by Wits University that fees for 2016 would increase by 10.5%. The response from the student community was a unified mass call to oppose this increase and halt the ability for the university to continue as usual until its management met with, and responded positively to student demands. Within two weeks, universities across the country stood in solidarity with Wits and also took up their own fees related causes which included ending the payment of exorbitant upfront and registrations fees, the high fees for international students, the cost of supplementary exams and intersecting issues such as the ending of outsourcing workers on campuses. The protests were varied in size, intensity and violence (on the part of students and the police force), but what was common was the call for students to be heard, engaged with and responded to by both the managements of their universities and the government.

2016 commenced with sporadic waves of protest throughout campuses, from Wits University protesting against registration fees, the University of Cape Town's "Shackville" and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's accommodation sit-in to the University of Pretoria's language policy protests, protest has become a key marker of student political action. While protest has played the role of making the voices of students louder and turning the attention of South Africans to student causes, it is unclear whether the impact of protest on the actual student experience and the change that students so desperately need can be measured. If not better understood and used as effectively as possible, student protest may become so normal that it loses its potential power and becomes performative, rather than transformative.

THE CONVERSATION:

With the aim of better understanding the value of protests, as well as the opportunities that student protests present for affecting change on campus and in society, Student Labs Wits will be hosting its first Policy Conversation for the year, themed: "To Protest or not to Protest?"

This conversation brings together students, political activists and academics to jointly consider the following questions:

- What is protest? What does it work to achieve?
- What are the limitations of protest action?
- What have been the greatest gains and setbacks through protest action at Wits University?
- How do we balance protest and other forms of engagement?

THE CONVERSATION STARTERS:

Ebrahim Fakir: Political analyst and former student leader.

Shereen Ally: Senior Lecturer, Wits University.

Anele Nzimande: Fees Must Fall, Wits University.

Fasiha Hassan: Secretary General, Student Representative Council, Wits University.

WHAT TO BRING:

- Your reflections on and expectations of protest action at Wits University.
- Your thinking hat.
- A friend.

DATE: 3 MARCH 2016

VENUE: THE ATRIUM, SOUTHWEST ENGINEERING BUILDING, EAST CAMPUS, WITS UNIVERSITY

TIME: 16:30 – 18:00

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED

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