

By [Aly-Khan Satchu](#), Guest blogger / July 19, 2010

Nairobi, Kenya

Revolutions typically happen dramatically. One day, the shah of Iran is sitting pretty on his peacock throne, and the next, he is gone.

Revolutions have been happening all over the African continent and at fairly regular intervals. The stories are numerous of coups and countercoups, and it's not for no good reason that Africa has typically sat at the bottom of the political stability indices. Even here, though, there comes a point at which you cannot go any lower. It's called "oversold." The political stability index for Africa has bottomed out, in fact.

During the tumult, vast African populations were just bystanders. The State and its paraphernalia – or rebel militias – might descend on your district every few years but, otherwise, things went on as they had. There was a single TV station to tell you what happened, and the world went by.

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It was a little biblical, with nature prone to ravage the land and famine just one failed harvest away.

But that's changing, and mobile phones are the engine of that change.

This year, in most parts of Africa, statistically, there will be one mobile phone per adult. In Kenya, that equates to 20 million mobile phones where just ten years ago there were 15,000. It is an extraordinary curve when you plot it. More Africans have a mobile phone than access to a clean toilet.

The mobile phone has connected all these bystanders, to one another and now to the world.

The mobile phone was a Silver Bullet for Africa. It was the entry ticket for Africans to join the 21st century.

Today, in Kenya, it is a mobile wallet, a phone, and a 3G internet-enabled device. Sixty percent of Africa's population is under 24. That means this moment of maximum change, a one off convergence with the 21st century, is happening with a very young population.

No disrespect, but revolutions are not undertaken by grandparents.

So you find this new generation of 21st-century Africans: young, connected, and embedded into the information economy. And you look at the average age of the African leadership and you see the widest spread you are ever likely to find. And you see an entirely new perspective on African political risk.

It's all about meeting the aspirations of a young, urbanized, and very demanding population. It's very disjunctive.

Where the state was like Gulliver, the phone has given the citizens a net with which to capture their Gulliver.

--- Aly-Khan Satchu blogs at [Rich Management](#).

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