

# Revisiting Youth Bulge Countries, Deprivation Hypothesis and Opportunity Perspective

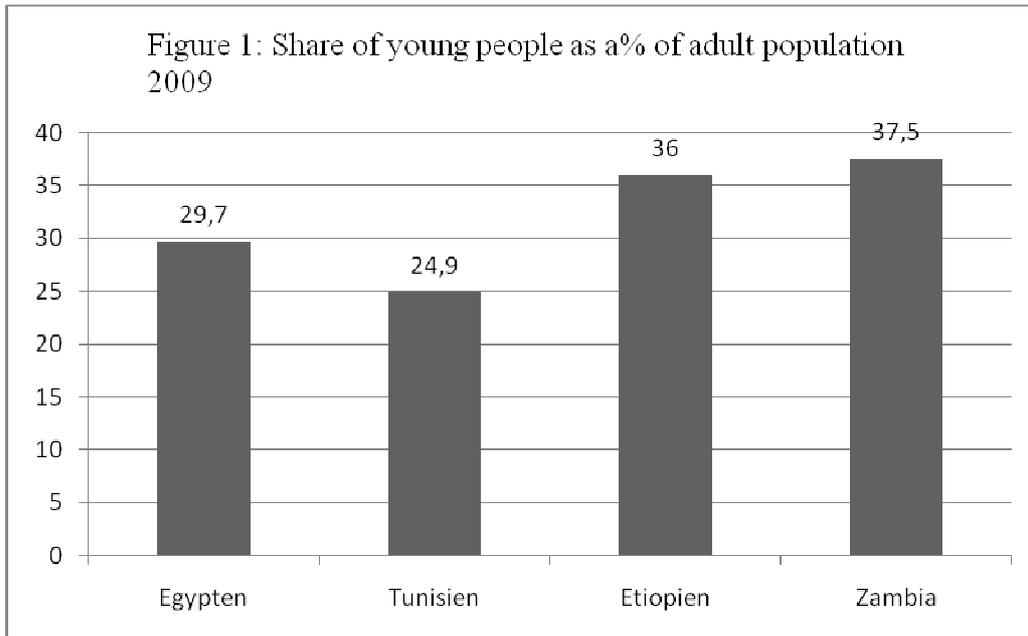
*By Tsegaye Tegenu*

This note is inspired from a class room discussion. As part of a course requirement students are requested to submit writing assignments (PM) on topics related to the course content. Two Swedish students wrote their PM under the title “Is political violence in countries with a young population a result of economic growth and higher education?” They compared Egypt and Tunisia with Ethiopia and Zambia where there is a “high proportion of young but not (yet?) undergone a revolution”. They “selected Egypt and Tunisia because of the demonstrations that erupted in February 2011. In Zambia and Ethiopia, with a high proportion of young people, no similar development has taken place”. Their main investigative question is “what economic and educational factors contribute to political instability in countries with a higher proportion of young people?” To add my own clarification point, is youth political violence a result of socio-economic deprivation or development opportunity?

The students considered total fertility rate, per capita income and youth unemployment to measure economic development. The variable of gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education is used to measure educational differences. They used the World Bank as their data source. Since these are undergraduate students who are supposed to write a course paper in two weeks time, depth analysis as regards the selection of variables should not be expected. Their analysis seems unsophisticated but it raises relevant question in the context of Ethiopia. In this paper I tried to develop their ideas further to challenge people who are expecting a political tsunami in Ethiopia. Specifically, my contribution will be in examining the deprivation hypothesis, motivational factors and conditions of nonviolent political movement.

## **First, similarity between youth bulge Countries**

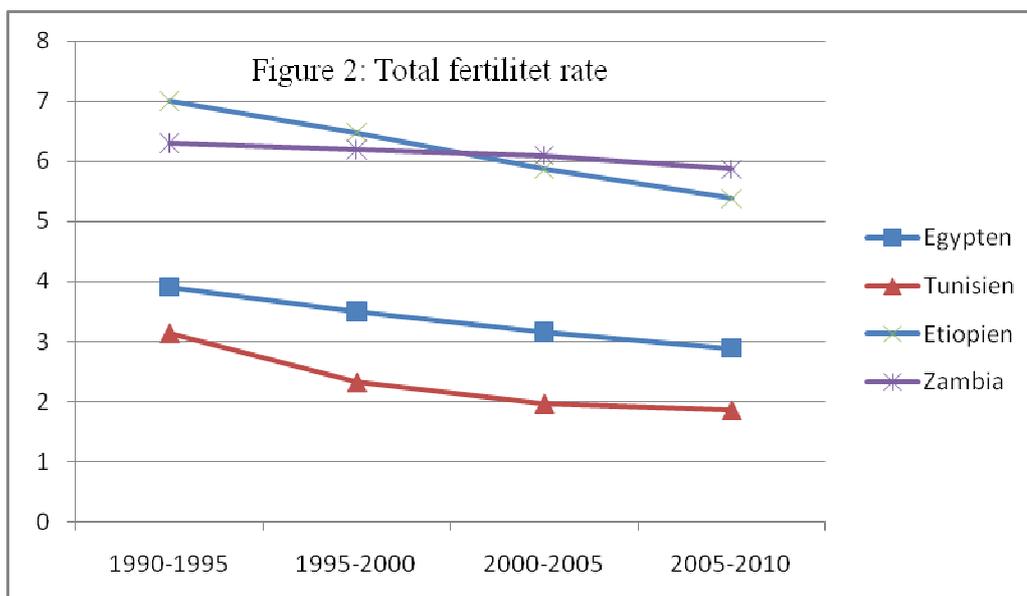
The students defined young people as aged 15-24, making up a large proportion of the total number of adults (aged 15 +). Citing from Urdal (2006), conflicts occur when the proportion of youth bulge exceeds 20% and this percent is found in all case study countries. They found out that Zambia and Ethiopia are close (37.5% and 36%, see Figure 1), and these countries have a higher proportion of young adult than Egypt and Tunisia which have 29.7% and 24.9 respectively.



Source: Anna Degerfeldt och Maria Stacke (March 2011).

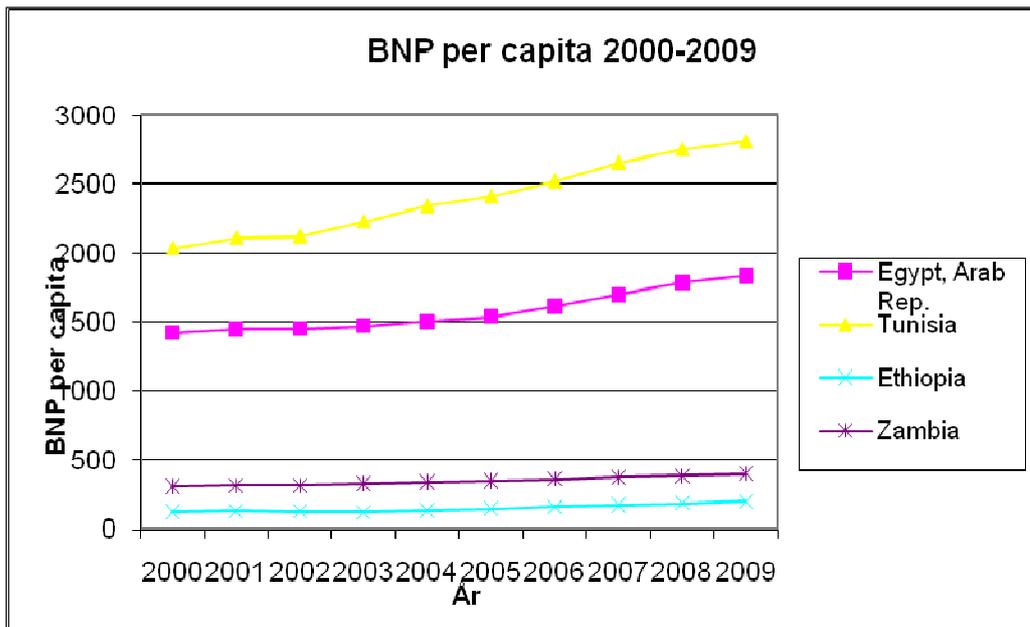
### Differences in level of economic development and employment

Concerning the variable of total fertility rate, their research results show that Tunisia and Egypt have relatively low fertility rate while Ethiopia and Zambia have higher rate (see figure 2). As we all know higher fertility rate and larger dependency ratio affects household saving capacity and government investment. In countries of higher fertility rate goods produced by the society are immediately used for consumption rather than for saving and investing in social well being and infrastructure (education, health, plants, factories, etc.). Higher fertility rate and increased dependency burden tends to reduce growth in total output or per capita income.



Source: Anna Degerfeldt och Maria Stacke (March 2011).

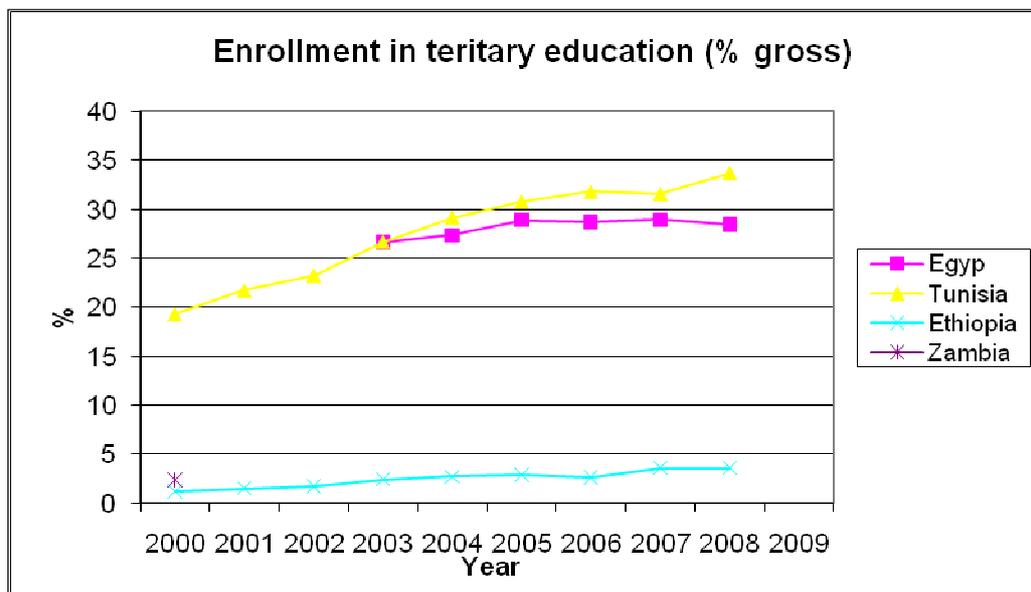
Ethiopia and Zambia have also significantly lower per capita GDP, compared to Egypt and Tunisia (see Figure 3 BNP per capita). According to the observation of the students, higher GDP and lower fertility suggests that the prospect for economic growth is higher in both Egypt and Tunisia than in Ethiopia and Zambia. High fertility means a large proportion of children are borne by the economy.



Source: Anna Degerfeldt och Maria Stacke (March 2011).

The students used youth unemployment rate to measure economic development, “because it shows a country's financial capacity to defend their young, working-age population”. It can also be seen as a measure of frustration and dissatisfaction which can serve as motivation for political violence (Urdal 2006). The unemployment data they have for Ethiopia, Zambia and Tunisia is incomplete and fragmented. The 2005 available data shows higher rate of youth unemployment for Egypt and Tunisia, 34.1% and 30.7%, respectively. The relative economic development of these countries did not “affect young people's economic situation positively”. In the case of Ethiopia data were not available at the country level. According to their findings, in 2004 unemployment among young people in urban areas was measured as 35%. Other sources claim that “Ethiopia has one of the highest urban unemployment rates worldwide, at about 50 per cent of the youth labour force.” (Berhanu Denu, et al. 2005/07). For analysis of rural unemployment for the same period see Tsegaye 2008.

As regards tertiary education, the students found “a clear difference between Egypt and Tunisia, which since 2003 have levels above 25%, where the rate also increased in Tunisia since 2000 to 2008, reaching 34% (see figure 4 on enrolment). In Ethiopia, the percentage has increased slowly from 2000 onwards and reaches 4% in 2008, significantly lower than Egypt and Tunisia. In Zambia, data from 2000 shows 3%, a relatively low figure”. The students believe that education is an important factor in a country's socioeconomic development. Better access to higher education in the context of declining fertility rate is positive contributing to economic development.



Source: Anna Degerfeldt och Maria Stacke (March 2011).

When presenting their findings and conclusion to the class, the students looked at me and said “it might require a degree of economic growth and education achievements for a large proportion of young people in Ethiopia and Zambia to be motivated and join nonviolent political movement”. I accepted the conclusion of their findings and remarked that they have not explained why development is necessary for nonviolent political movement.

Their conclusion seems simple, but it presents a diametrically opposite view to an explanation which we often hear about the interaction of youth bulge and economic decline. The students arrived to such conclusion because they started their analysis from unbiased perspective. They knew neither the views of the Ethiopian opposition nor the government. They started from a simple comparative observation of countries and they followed their data findings as explained above. The students concluded with an open question which they could not answer: a relatively higher economic development and education enrolment is required to

start a nonviolent political movement in countries where the youth constitute more than 20 % of the adult population. The question why should there be a need for certain level of economic development and tertiary enrolment ratio to start a nonviolent political movement in youth bulge countries has to be answered. Does that mean youth bulge number and grievances do not matter by themselves?

### **Revisiting the Deprivation Hypothesis**

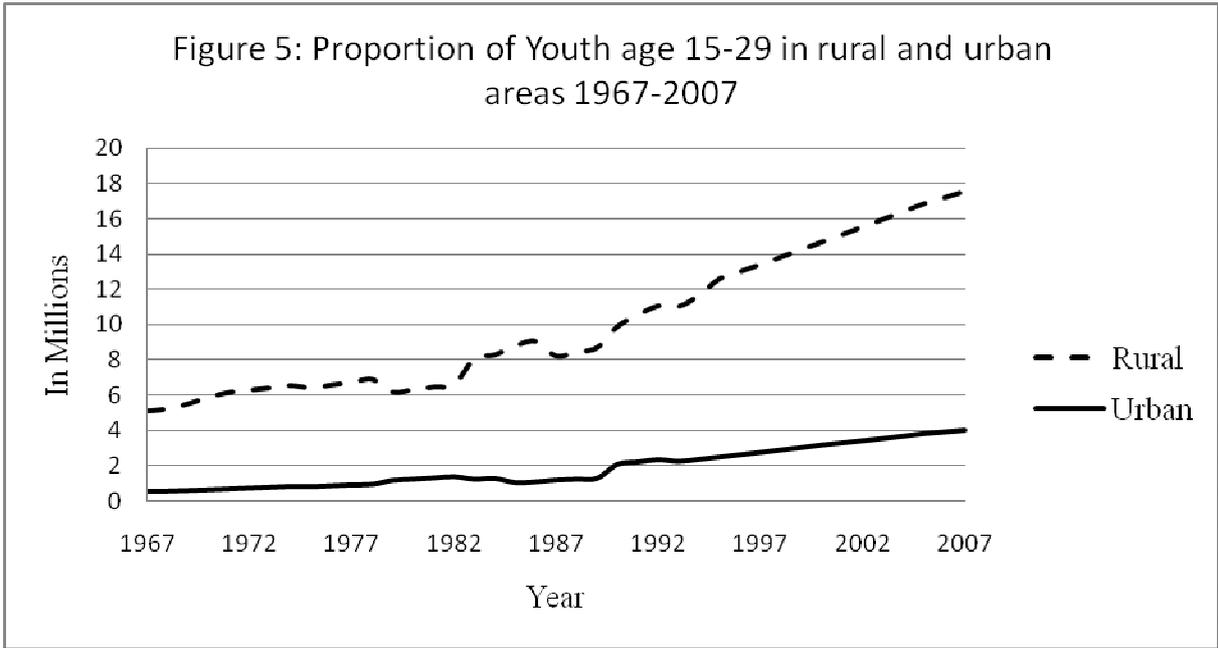
In the digital media news we often hear that grievances related to economic well being and governance leads the Egyptian and Tunisian youth to political violence to redress the problems. The grievance perspective has its origins in relative deprivation theory. Motives for committing political violence can be economic, like poverty, economic recession or inequality; political, like lack of democracy, absence of minority representation or self-governance. Most of the literature on youth bulges and political violence fits into this tradition (Urdal 2006).

Deprivation hypothesis over predicts incidents of civil strife (Kahl 1998). If poverty and deprivation were sufficient to lead people to rebel against their government or fight each other, the entire world would be engulfed in the flames of organized violence (Eckstein, 1971), which is not the case in many sub Saharan African countries. The existence of serious grievances is not sufficient for collective violent action to erupt (Urdal 2006). The youth or the poor needs resources to redress the problem through political violence. One of the resources is access to financial and armed means.

The 1974 and 1991 revolutions in Ethiopia are good examples about the resource requisites needed to make a political revolution. The armed forces in Ethiopia during the regime of Haile Sellassie were part of the poor people living in wretched conditions. Since they had the means they rebelled against the regime. In 1991 the poor Ethiopian farmers and youth organized themselves in guerrilla movements for a decade were able to overthrow the dictatorial government of the Derg. These examples show that the likelihood that grievances are redressed through political violence increases when the poor and the youth have access to finance and arms. Social and economic deprivation and grievances alone do not lead to political violence.

### Economic Development as an opportunity and means for starting nonviolence political movement

If the poor and youth have no means similar to the 1974 and 1991 Ethiopian situation, what alternative opportunities do they have to engage in nonviolence movement? We have seen that grievances and youth number are not enough by themselves. There is a need for an opportunity and means. Particularly in the context of Ethiopia, where the majority of the youth is living in the rural areas (see figure 5), economic development is necessary to consolidate existing fragmentation that is based on local identity.



Source: Tsegaye 2008

The assumption that the current fragmentation in Ethiopia is the work of the “Woyane” is utterly wrong. We Ethiopians should accept that we all have local identity shaped not by politics but by the century old practice of agricultural activity. Local identity has been the source of our division and will remain so until the country experience a structural transformation of the economy. In other words, fragmentation based on local identity continues to exist until such a time that the majority of us have an industrial working class background and culture. In a previous posting ([http://aigaforum.com/articles/understanding\\_egypt\\_rev.php](http://aigaforum.com/articles/understanding_egypt_rev.php)) I underlined the necessity of growth-driven urbanization for the emergence of an independent and critical thinking mind.

How economic development serves as an opportunity for nonviolence political movement? Independent and critical thinking mind created through education and economic

development motivates the youth to participate in non-violence movement. Motivation is study of the choice people make when faced with many decisions. Motivation can be discussed in terms of the major forces that derive the youth to make a choice, diverse influences and concrete output that results from taking the decisions. In this paper I am trying to relate motivation to the variables of economic development and educational attainment discussed above. Can differences in the level of economic growth and higher education affect our choice of participation and non participation in a non-violent movement? There may be different theories as to how economic growth and higher education motivates the youth to participate in a nonviolent movement. I would like to discuss the interactions between these variables in terms of the concept of opportunity cost.

My thesis is that high opportunity costs motivate youth to actively sustain a nonviolence political movement if and when the fear wall is broken. As I understand the opportunity cost of non participation in Ethiopia and Zambia is zero (i.e., the benefit lost by not participating is zero). Comparatively, the opportunity cost of non-participation is high for the youth of Tunisia and Egypt (the scarify/price they pay for choosing not to participant is high).

In Ethiopia and Zambia, the youth may not expect creation of jobs after a successful accomplishment of a nonviolent political movement. The saving and investment capacity of the state (measured above by total fertility rate and per capita income) is so low that there is less likelihood of job creation after the revolution. One can contrast this situation with the welfare programs introduced in many Arab countries in the wake of Egyptian revolution. The youth in Zambia and Ethiopia knows very well that their countries do not promise jobs and housing after a revolution. If some of us assume that there will be job creation, the youth has not acquired the necessary skill and higher education to sell its labour in the market. The levels of the economy and education is such that they do not motivate individuals to participate in the movement. Thus, the saying “*dehnet yemoqal*” translated as “poverty makes you lazy”.

The other hindering factor is the notion of free ride. Individuals contemplating engagement in political violence against state faces significant consequences including the risk of one’s life and property. But the benefits accrued from the movement are frequently public, or collective, in nature. It may be so that highly educated individuals who have not joined the violent movement may have the chance to "free ride" on the efforts of other youths. This situation can create powerful disincentives for individuals to join the nonviolent movement or form an organized conflict group.

In Ethiopia there is the customary observation and saying that it is the son and daughters of the poor families who scarify by participating in a political violence. They are the one who are losing by being involved in nonviolent political movement. This way of expression really indicates the opportunity costs involved in a nonviolent movement. In countries where local identity prevails, individuals do not join the movement simply out of yearn for freedom. Freedom, though fundamental to human beings, the yearn for it is often associated with the creation and expansion of an independent and critically thinking mind. We should not forget that in Ethiopia individuals act often within the context of local identity. Individuals do not join a conflict group out of their own decision and without waiting for others reaction as is happening in an urbanized environment and culture.

## **Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP): Political Conflict Trigger or Avider**

If economic growth and higher education are conditions for the rise of nonviolent struggle in Egypt and Tunisia, it is interesting to see the role of GTP. I will summarize the objectives of the plan in terms of the variables selected by the students. In the period 2010/11-2014/15, GTP has an objective to accelerate and move the economic growth rate to the 11-15% rate. It intends to promote industrialization in predefined areas and doubling of the agricultural output by scaling-up the best practices of model farmers. GTP aims to transform the Ethiopian economy into the middle income countries of northern Africa (including Tunisia and Egypt).

GTP has the objectives of expanding education, training and health service (nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, increasing of access to potable water, etc). The programs of social sector development (including women enrolment in education) may accelerate the moderate decline in the total fertility rate (five years time may not be enough to reach to the level of Egypt and Tunisia, unless accompanied by rapid urbanization which alters fertility behaviour, postpone marriage and reduce maternal fertility).

Improving the management and administration of universities and increasing higher education enrolment is one of the main ingredients of the GTP social sector development program. Government higher institution intake capacity (undergraduate) is expected to increase from 185788 (2110 baseline) to 467000 by the end of the plan period, with an average annual intake of 56000 undergraduate students.

If the GTP financial gap can be met and the expected targets realized, then we have the creation of the necessary economic and social conditions which motivate the youth to

participate in nonviolent political movement. As we all know autocracy and the culture of corruption are some of the specific grievances of rioters in Egypt and Tunisia. As stated in the plan objectives, GTP aims to avoid arbitrary rule and institutional corruption by ensuring good governance and justice. If these intentions of the government are not realized as the economy improves, theoretically speaking we will have a nonviolent political movement by the end of realizing the GTP plan period. Unlike others I am of the opinion that the ball is still in the hands of the government. Ethiopia, though a youth bulge country, is still an agricultural society and it is too demanding to expect an urban based nonviolent political movement like Egypt and Tunisia. Seen from a rational perspective, it is in the interest of the opposition groups to work for the realization of GTP targets.

*For comments the author can be reached at [tsegaye.tegenu@epmc.se](mailto:tsegaye.tegenu@epmc.se)*

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