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Will Sub-Saharan Africa follow North Africa? Backgrounds and preconditions of popular revolt in the light of the 'Arab spring'

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INTRODUCTION[1]

The year 2011 has undeniably been a special one for the African continent. On 14 January 2011 massive street protests in Tunisia ousted President Z. Ben Ali, a long-time North African leader,[2] leading to what has been called the 'Jasmine Revolution'.[3]

Two weeks later, Egypt successfully engaged in its own revolutionary movement. The totalitarian Libyan regime would end one year later with the brutal death of Mouammar al-Gaddafi on 20 October 2011. In the space of one year and a half, three serving presidents were forced out of office by their own people. In a contagious movement, this seemingly unstoppable wave of revolution inspired popular rebellion movements in other Arab countries. In some of them, such as Algeria, Morocco, or Bahrain, the popular contestation seems to have been abandoned by late 2012, while other countries, such as Yemen and especially Syria, are still today immersed in civil war.

In 1992 Samuel Huntington referred to the political liberalization movements in Central Europe as the '*third democratic wave in history'*.[4] In the same spirit, and following the chronology of events, we could consider the Arab Spring as the '*fourth wave'*. What seems most amazing is the fact that we did observe a 'horizontal contagion', if we consider Tunisia, Egypt and Libya as North African Arab countries. But if we take a more 'vertical' view, considering those same countries as African, we can no more talk about contagion, since no African country entered into a revolution since the start of the Jasmine revolution.

Many factors were behind the 'Arab Spring', but this study proposes to explore the *socio-demographic* ones, focusing on the cases of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The research aims also at an understanding of what this North African wave of revolts may mean for Sub-Saharan Africa.

What were the main socio-demographic factors behind the Jasmine revolution? Will these same factors support the Tunisian population in achieving their democratic transition? Can we expect that other North African countries (Morocco, Algeria, or Mauritania) to

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[1] This paper was prepared during a visiting fellowship at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, in September-November 2012. I am grateful to prof. Jon Abbink of the ASC for comments and discussions on the subject of this paper, and for his suggestion to look at the work of Richard Cincotta (see list of references).
[2] General Zine el Abidine Ben Ali came to power on 7 November 1987.
[3] The jasmine is a fragrant flower growing in Tunisia, and considered as a symbol of welcome.
[4] See Huntington 1992.

engage in such a process? Why has none of the Sub Saran African countries followed in the footsteps of Tunisia? Will there be an 'Arab Spring' for Sub-Saharan Africa? These are some of the questions to which I will try to find answers in this study.

The paper is organized into four sections. The first one briefly recalls the circumstances of the Arab Spring and its first manifestation in the Tunisian revolution. The second part of the study discusses the main socio-demographic determinants that lead to the Jasmine revolution. The third part discusses the representation of the revolution in the eyes of young Tunisians. The last part examines the situation in the other African countries, trying to explain why we had such a dichotomy between North Africa engaged in a fierce struggle against dictators on the one hand, and a more lethargic popular response in Sub-Saharan Africa on the other hand.

THE 'ARAB SPRING'

This first part of this study briefly describes the circumstances of the Arab Spring, starting from the Tunisian events.

Although it seems difficult to determine the exact date of the beginning of the Jasmine revolution, we will suppose here that it all started on 17 December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old unemployed graduate in the town of Sidi Bouzid,[5] was selling fruits in the street and saw his wares and equipment confiscated by the police. When he tried to recover his belongings, he was abused by the police, and slapped by a policewoman. Vexed, he splashed himself with fuel and set himself on fire in front of the governorate headquarter of the town, thereby provoking an expanding, country-wide wave of popular protest that ended on 14 January with a general strike and a mass demonstration of more than one million persons in front of the Ministry of Interior in the centre of Tunis. After a fierce struggle between the population and the police,[6] President Z. Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia with his family.

Starting from 25 January 2011, similar uprisings took place in many cities in Egypt, where millions of protesters belonging to various socio-economic and religious groups at the peril of their lives demanded the removal of long-time President Hosni Mubarak. The protests lead to violent and lethal clashes with the security forces, but on 11 February 2011 Mubarak finally resigned from office.

As expected, a similar scenario took place in Libya, where popular protests started in Benghazi on 15 February 2011. As the police fired on the crowds, the peaceful contestation movement rapidly escalated into a rebellion that spread across the whole country, demanding the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. On 20 October 2011 Gaddafi himself was apprehended and killed by rebels, leading finally to the 'liberation' of Libya and the taking over of power by the National Transitional Council on 23 October 2011.

The first question we could pose here is if the Tunisian revolution really started with the death of Mohamed Bouazizi. As in most popular uprisings that took place in the world, the Arab Spring was the result of the slow, imperceptible accumulation of a multitude of micro-events, ending with a mass reaction. This is precisely what happened in Tunisia. Since 1987, when Ben Ali came to power, so many small events took place, creating then consolidating a sentiment of frustration among the population: racketeering, confiscation of

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[5] Disadvantaged town situated in the centre of Tunisia.
[6] Around 300 victims were reported during the clashes.

land, unmerited promotions, abuse of power, unfair imprisonment, etc. When a "normal" citizen expressed his frustration in a dramatic way, everything suddenly turned upside down.

If young Mohamed Bouazizi had not immolated himself on 17 December 2010[7], someone else would have, and another incident of suicide or of public attack or hostage taking could also have triggered it. Today, we tend to say that all started in Sidi Bouzid,[8] but it could also have began anywhere in Tunisia. And what happened in the beginning of 2011 could probably have taken place one year before, or two years later. It could have started during the popular turmoil that took place in 2008 in Gafsa,[9] or in August 2010 in Ben Guerdane.[10] Obviously, the conditions behind the Jasmine revolution had existed since long.

The parable of the lily pond is a good example of what happened in the region. In a pond, every day, the size of the lily doubles, but nobody notices it. The penultimate day, the lily covers half the pond surface, but still nobody realizes the emergency of the situation. The last day, the water lily covers the whole surface of the pond, suffocating it and eliminating all traces of life, in what seemed to be a quite micro-environment. But now it is too late to do anything.[11]

The second remark one could make is on the similarity of the scenarios between the three North African countries: peaceful protests were brutally managed, leading to popular rebellion. The only difference between the three cases is that the revolution was much more rapid in Tunisia and Egypt (two weeks only between the first manifestations and the fall of the regime) than in Libya, where the process took more than 8 months and saw the involvement of foreign forces supporting the opposition.

As a reaction to the fall of the Tunisian regime, many Arab countries took peaceful measures to temper the anger of their frustrated populations as a last step before using violence. In Morocco, king Mohamed VI proposed to change the constitution and to organize democratic elections.[12] In Egypt, the government recruited 795 new graduates of oil engineering schools. The Syrian government cut fuel prices at the pump, while Jordan increased pensions.

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[7] He died on 5 January 2011.
[8] A poor town situated in the centre of Tunisia.
[9] Town in the centre of Tunisia.
[10] Situated in the extreme south of the country.
[11] See Jacquard 1998.
[12] That would push the Party of Justice (an Islamist political party) to power.

The Arab oil-producing countries massively used the power of money by drawing on annuity-provided resources. The Algerian government for instance, granted significant wage increases to civil servants.[13] The Kuwaiti government distributed 4 billion US$ in cash to the population to buy the social peace. Such actions are of course ineffective in the medium term, as it is unclear how long the pockets of the oil-producing countries could cocoon them from human reactions. In addition, such measures cause national inflation in the long term.

We tend to say that what happened in Tunisia and then in the Arab world was totally unexpected and had never before taken place in the region. But in fact, the model followed by the Arab Spring is not completely new. For that reason, and before going further in our analysis, it would be interesting to try and make the link with the model of the political cycle in Arab countries as described by Abdel-Rahman Ibn Khaldoun in the 14th century.

The 'political cycle' of Ibn Khaldoun

Abdel-Rahman Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) was a reputed Muslim historian and considered as one of the forerunners of modern historiography and sociology. He is best known for his *Al Muqaddima* (*Prolegomenon*), written in 1377 as the preface of his *Kitab al-Ibar.*[14] *Al Muqaddima* was so lengthy a work that it was considered as an independent book in his lifetime. I will try to show to what extent the Jasmine revolution followed the political cycle proposed by Ibn Khaldoun[15] in *Al Muqaddima*.

The political cycle as described by Ibn Khaldoun

From his observations on the rise and fall of the dynasties of the past, Ibn Khaldoun determined a political cycle, composed of five stages.

All begins with the arrival to power of an individual, acting in the name of people, claiming to bring more justice. This first phase is violent, generating conflicts or civil war, as the new leader or king takes the power from the hands of the former one. The former king is killed, imprisoned or exiled.

At this stage, the new leader is an exemplar and is acclaimed by the people, and his power is legitimized by the risks he took to overthrow the former regime. He is at the service

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[13] For example, the wages of university professors were doubled.

[14] The full title is *Kitabu al ibar wa diwan al mubtada wa al khabar fi tarikhi al arab wa al barbar wa man asharahum min dhawi al shaan al akbar*, 'Book of lessons, record of beginnings and events in the history of the Arabs and Berbers and their powerful contemporaries'.

[15] Born on 27 May 1332 in Tunis and died on 17 March 1406 in Cairo.

of the community, his power is fed by the *assabia*[16] ('instinct' of the group), and his victory is considered as the 'victory of the people'.

In a second stage, the new king more and more monopolizes power while keeping his relatives in the background. But the latter will claim a part of power, in the name of the principle of *assabia*. To exercise his power, the new king needs to surround himself with a *hachia*, a court sufficiently well maintained to be loyal.

In the third stage of the cycle, the king starts 'forgetting' his first democratic claims or mandate, focusing on two major issues: accumulating a personal treasure, which leads him to confuse the public funds with his own properties; and an obsession with the need to 'leave traces'. For that reason, he starts building huge edifices: palaces, mosques, or monuments with a common characteristic: disproportionate size compared to the level of life of the nation. The goal is to impress the people, but above all foreign visitors. In the same spirit, the king gives gifts to the dignitaries of the regime and to ambassadors of friendly countries and looks after constituting elite troops, well equipped and overpaid. To cover these expenses, the leader generally increases the tax pressure on his people.

In the fourth stage, satisfaction, luxury and idleness push the king in the way to passivity and laziness. This period is characterized by calm, immobility and stagnation.

In the fifth and last stage of the cycle, the king lapses into wasting, engaging in huge expenses to satisfy his passions, but also the passions of his kinship circle. He surrounds himself with courtiers of bad reputation and gives them political, diplomatic and economic missions far beyond their competence. He takes his distance from the leaders of his tribe, provoking resentment and hate among them.

Ibn Khaldoun here underlines an important fact: the king or leader destroys the foundations settled by his predecessors, pushing the people toward sentiments of regret or longing for the ancient regime. This model, incidentally, was in similar terms also described by Plato and Aristotle.

Finally the dynasty, affected by corruption, breaks down.[17] The rupture of the equilibrium between the reigning dynasty and the rising protesting tribes leads to the emergence of a new king.

At this stage, it would be interesting to check if the Jasmine revolution followed this model proposed by Ibn Khaldoun.

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[16] The concept of *assabia* is central in the theory of Ibn Khaldoun, used more than 500 times in the *Muqaddima*.
[17] See Bousquet 1965, p. 89.

The Tunisian Case

To see the similarities between the rise and fall of Ben Ali and the political cycle of Ibn Khaldoun, let us review one by one the five stages of his model.

All started on the morning of 7 November 1987, when General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, then prime minister, replaced President Habib Bourguiba, accusing him of senility. He based his action on a medical report of seven physicians and used Article 57 of the Tunisian constitution stating that a president who has lost his intellectual capacities can be replaced by his prime minister.

Following Ibn Khaldoun's model, Ben Ali was in the beginning a champion of justice and democracy, and was admired and acclaimed by his people. His power was legitimated by the risks undertaken to eliminate the former leader. The new president then crystallized the hopes of the whole nation, and his prestige was immense.

During a number of years Ben Ali seemed to work exclusively for the interest of his people, his priorities being the internal security,[18] good economic governance and the international repositioning of the country in the world.

What happened next also fits the model of Ibn Khaldoun: Ben Ali monopolized power and kept his relatives in the background, ignoring the principle of *assabia.* To reinforce his power, Ben Ali surrounded himself with loyal persons and created a militia. He then started building up a personal fortune, with the boundary between his own personal property and public property becoming vague.

In the late 1990s Ben Ali 'forgot' his democratic discourse and aims and became obsessed by the need to leave public traces of his power: he built a big mosque in Carthage, a monument in the 7 November Square, etc. He also started wasting the public budget to satisfy his own and his family's passion for luxury cars, yachts, villa houses, etc.

At the end of the cycle, the people had become so frustrated that the situation ended with turmoil and a revolution.

We know today that many other reasons were behind these protest movements as well. Below, we will focus on the socio-demographic ones.


[18] When he came to power, Islamist groups carried out terrorist attacks in the country.

THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF THE ARAB SPRING

The three North African countries engaged in the Arab Spring share common socio-demographic characteristics, which have played a major role in preparing the events. The most important factor is without doubt the youth.

The youth

These are the age pyramids of the three North African countries engaged in the revolutions:
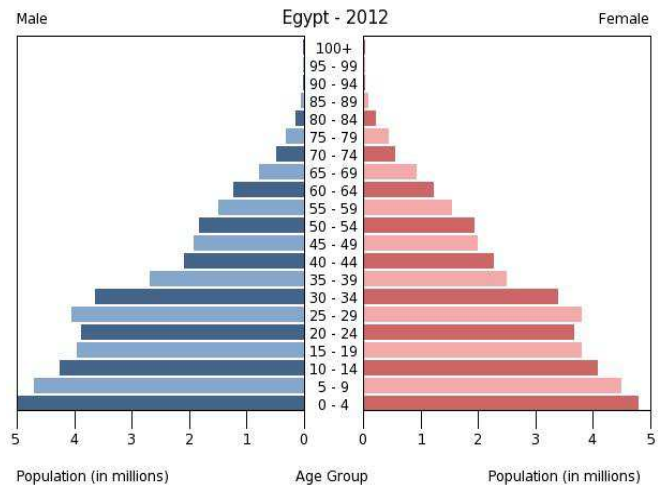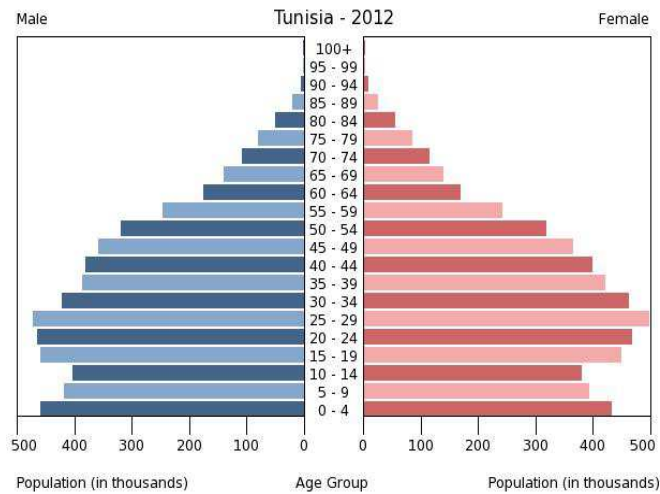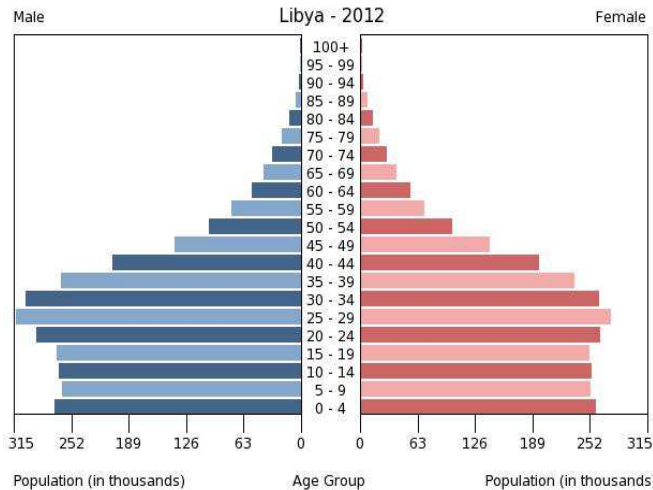
(Source: US Census Bureau, *International data base*)

Undeniably, the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan populations are very young. In the mid 1980s, however, there has been a collapse of the fertility level in a few countries: it is today only 2 children/woman in Tunisia and 2.1 children/woman in Libya,[19] while it is a little higher (2.5 children per woman) in Algeria. As a result, we observe today in the age pyramids a beginning ageing process in both Tunisia and Libya.

However, the three countries are still very young. More precisely, they are at a point called by the demographers the "demographic dividend", *i.e.* a period during which the major part of the population is constituted by young adults of working age.[20]

In fact, the effects of this decline in fertility only begin to be felt much later, with a "ripple effect" among the population.[21] The numerous generations from a previous period of high fertility are now beginning to reach reproductive age - which is higher than that of their elders - and will thus continue to produce many generations, with the number of individuals reproducing offsetting their lower fertility. These numerous generations, which represent "demographic waves", will thus defer the effects of demographic transition. For that reason, and despite the aging process underway in Tunisia and Libya (although still unclear in Egypt), the society still has a high proportion of youths and adolescents.[22]

This point is very important, as we know that the Arab Spring was initiated and carried

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[19] These two are among the rare Arab countries where the fertility rate is equal or below the replacement of generation level (2.1 children/woman).
[20] Such a period is considered as ideal because it offers the possibility to the majority of the population to contribute to the economic development of the country. But this can occur only in a situation of full employment, which is not the case in the North African societies.
[21] See Bouhdiba 2003.
[22] Distribution between the sexes is almost equal.

predominantly by young people.[23] Roughly speaking, one can estimate that youths accounted for about 75% of the demonstrators in Tunisia.[24] Would there have been so many protesters in the streets if only 6 or 7% of the Tunisian, Egyptian or Libyan population was aged 20-34 years?

The following table gives an overview of the youth in the region:

Part of the population aged 20-34

Country/region	Percentage (%)
Tunisia	25.9
Egypt	26.7
Libya	30.2
Africa	24.4
North Africa	26.2
West Africa	23.6
East Africa	23.3
Middle Africa	23.6
Southern Africa	29.1
Northern Europe	20.1
More Developed Countries	20.3

(Source: US Census Bureau, *International data base*)

Globally, we see that in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya between one third and one fourth of the population is aged between 20 and 34. Figures are slightly higher than in the other African regions, and much higher than in the Global North.

Before examining the other socio-demographic dimensions of the North African spring, it is important to underline that demographer Richard Cincotta has conducted a study on the revolutions[25] that occurred between 1972 and 1989. He tried to make a link between the median age[26] of a population and its chance of democratizing after entering into revolution. He came to the conclusion that autocracies with a median population age between 25 and 35 had the best chances of democratizing.

In his research, Cincotta found out that all of countries that made the transition when their median age was greater than 30 are still democracies today. Nine out of ten countries

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[23] It is funny to remind here that 2011 has been declared by the United Nations *Year of the Young*
[24] An estimate based on the observation of pictures of large gatherings in Tunis, Sousse, Kasserine and Sfax.
[25] See Cincotta *2*009, p. 15, and Cincotta & Doces 2011, pp. 98-116.
[26] Age reached by 50% of the population. That means that half the population is aged more and the other half aged less than the median age.

with a median age less than 25 slid back into oppressive regimes following a revolution. If the pattern of Cincotta holds, Tunisia, with a median age of 30 is the North African Arab Spring country most likely to hold democracy permanently. Egypt and Libya have younger median ages, respectively 25 and 26. They could move to democracy in the next years but this is not certain. On this argument, however, Syria and Yemen are too young (median ages are 21 years in Syria and only 17 years in Yemen) and thus have low probabilities to end up with a durable democracy.

At a more global level, the median ages in Africa are the following:

- Africa: 19.2
- East Africa: 17.9
- Middle Africa: 17.4
- Northern Africa: 24.2
- Southern Africa: 24.4
- Western Africa: 18.5

Basing ourselves on the model proposed by Cincotta, we could confirm the fact that Northern and Southern African countries are more likely to enter into a revolution ending with a stable democracy.

Education

The Tunisian population is highly educated compared to the other North African and Arab countries.[27] This is a result of the strategies of 'education for all' introduced since the independence of the country in 1956. In fact, the rate of schooling of the children aged 6-14 was raised from 10% in 1946 to 95.1% today, with an equilibrium between genders (95.5% for boys and 94.7% for girls). The net secondary school enrolment is also high: 67% for boys and 63% for girls.[28]

We could then say that education is nearly universal in Tunisia, with high equity between genders concerning access to the schooling system. This is a quite rare phenomenon in the Arab world.

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[27] If we consider quantitative indicators such as school enrolment. Considering the quality of the schooling system may lead to other conclusions.
[28] US Population Reference Bureau data.

At the university level, the rate of schooling (the proportion of those aged 19-24 registered in a university) is around 50% today, with 260.000 students enrolled in the different universities. Thus, around 35.000 young men and women graduate every year from the 14 Tunisian universities, but with poor perspectives of finding a job.

Paradoxically, high levels of education were a major problem in Tunisia, and were a factor for the initiation of the protests among the young and then the entire population. In fact, political awareness and the capacity of making political analyses is related to education.

Unemployment

Officially, the unemployment rate in Tunisia is today 20%, but it is certainly much higher if we take into account the insecure jobs (short-term contracts, trainees, employment created by small private companies, etc.). In Egypt, official rates were even higher, being over 24% in 2009.[29] Although having the highest per capita income in Africa, Libya suffers around 25% unemployment.

During the last decade, both the Tunisian and Egyptian governments have not been able to provide full employment to their youths, even to those most qualified. The tempo of official job creation has failed to match population growth (0.97+% in Tunisia and +1.94% in Egypt, between 2011 and 2012). The Tunisian economy creates no more than 40.000 jobs per year, while there is a need for additional 140.000 jobs every year.

A recent survey made two years before the Jasmine Revolution by The World Bank and the Tunisian Ministry of Employment[30] came to the alarming conclusion that 46% of university graduates from 2004 had still not found employment 18 months after graduation. Unemployment rates for young graduates vary from 47.1% (license in law or economics) to 43.2% (Master in social sciences), and even 68% (licenses in legal sciences). Some humanities and social science specializations are considered by the students as "joblessness diplomas", such as Arabic, Philosophy, or Sociology. Only some technical fields may lead to a job in the short term, as for example computer sciences, or engineering. But even in these, the unemployment rate is around 25%.[31]

This hopeless situation has been in part created by the rapid increase in the number of the young, but mainly by the 'democratization' of higher education, which consisted of almost

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[29] United Nations data.

[30] République Tunisienne, *Dynamique de l'emploi et adéquation de la formation parmi les diplômés universitaire, vol.1: Rapport sur l'insertion des diplômés de l'année 2004*, Tunis, Banque Mondiale, 2008.

[31] See African Development Bank / Banque Africaine de Développement 2011, p. 2.

free registration in public universities[32] and subsidization of the costs of the student's services (university homes, canteens, etc.). At the same time, there has been a fall in both private and public employment. In Tunisia, employment in the public sector fell from 25% in the late 1980s to 21% in 2010. The whole North African region has experienced the same phenomenon, except Libya, where employment was boosted by the oil revenues.

A 10% annual economic growth is required to address Tunisia's chronic youth unemployment crisis. Yet, despite its status as an "emerging" country, it has never exceeded 5% economic growth and is currently, since the 2011 revolution, experiencing negative growth.

Emigration to access professional opportunities abroad once offered an alternative to high-skilled unemployment. However, since the closure of Europe's borders, professional emigration has been displaced by illegal migration to Italy and France. The global crisis and especially the Euro crisis have completed the ruin of job prospects among young Tunisians.

Therefore, compared to other countries in the global South, Tunisia distinguishes itself by high unemployment rate among university graduates. In 1984 the unemployment rate among the graduates from universities was only 0.7%, while it was 21.9% in 2010, reaching 60% in some sections, as literature or the social sciences. In Egypt, 24.8% of the university graduates are unemployed.[33]

Such a situation creates deep frustration among the young, and also among their families, as they have made many financial sacrifices to permit to their children to achieve their studies.

Urbanization

North African populations are highly urbanized. Today, urbanization rates are 68% in Tunisia and 78% in Libya.[34] Egypt is a much more rural country, with only 43% of the population living in cities. And we know that one of the characteristics of the Arab Spring was that the major events took place in the central squares of the big and middle-sized cities of the country.

In fact, in Tunisia the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the burning of police stations, the attacks against the Ministry of Interior and the sit-in in front of the Prime

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[32] Between 30-100 Tunisian Dinars, around 15-50 Euros.
[33] Data of OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).
[34] US Population Reference Bureau.data.

Minister's office in El Kasbah took place in front of the symbols of the Ben Ali regime, and in particular near the headquarters of the governorates, the municipalities or the head offices of the firms belonging to the president's clan. All these spaces are typically urban.

In Egypt, riots also took place primarily in the big cities, such as Cairo or Alexandria, and in Libya most events occurred in Benghazi, Tripoli and other middle-sized cities that easily attract huge crowds of urban youths.

'Empowerment'

In Tunisia, the traditional state education strategy, the strong opening towards the Mediterranean and Europe as well as globalization processes were major factors that contributed to the empowerment of women: they were more vocal, relatively well-educated, and had recognized rights. Women also played an important role in the popular manifestations that led the regimes of Ben Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi to their fall, e.g. via the electronic media.

The Internet

Internet has had a huge success in Tunisia and Egypt, where penetration (percentage of Internet users among the population) reached respectively 36.3% and 26.4% in 2011.[35] In Libya, penetration was only 5.6% in 2011.[36]

In Tunisia, one third of homes have a direct or indirect access to the web.[37] Most of them are living in urban areas. There are 305 cyber-cafes, nearly always crowded, as they are very popular and cheap.[38] In fact, Internet access is easy to anyone who knows how to use a keyboard. The number of Internet users has doubled in the past three years, reaching today 700.000 users, and the number of accounts is now more than a 100.000. The number of connection contracts is about 24.000, and there are around 2000 Tunisian websites.

Tunisian people in general are great lovers of *Facebook*, the use of which played a central role in the rapid organization of big rallies (of more than a 100.000 people). In fact, the Tunisian and Egyptian police were only accustomed to controlling small public gatherings in private spaces (houses, firms, etc.) before they became too big and seem to have had serious difficulties in thwarting the new "e-meetings" during the protests of 2011-12.

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[35] Internet World Stat.
[36] In 2011, penetration was only 13.5% in Africa, while it was 78.6% in North America.
[37] Agence Tunisienne d'Internet.
[38] One hour connection costs 1.8 Tunisian Dinars, about 0.9 Euros.

The young Tunisian bloggers also asked the help from Anonymous, the international network of hackers, who hacked the websites of the Presidency and the Ministry of Interior.[39] Slim Amamou, a leading revolutionary blogger and member of the Pirate Party, was imprisoned by the former regime, before being appointed as deputy to the Minister for Youth and Sports in the new government.[40]

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[39] The most efficient hackers originate from Russia.
[40] He resigned on 25 May 2011 in protest of the transitional government's blockade of several websites.

THE REVOLUTION IN THE EYES OF THE TUNISIAN YOUTH

I conducted a light survey among 326 protesters chosen at random during the two first weeks of January 2011. The results of the survey enabled me to develop a characterization of the "real protestor", the one who was angry to the point of going to the streets, demanding, at the cost of life, the departure of President Ben Ali. The survey was also precious in better understanding how young people saw the revolution during but also after the fall of the dictatorial regime.

There are, however, several methodological issues implied by using such "spontaneous" samples. The interviews took place in the centre of Tunis, which may not be representative of the whole country. In addition, when choosing the protester to interview, the interviewer may be biased, for example avoiding to choose an old woman, being convinced that she is there by chance and not as part of the protest movement.

A typology of the protester

Most protesters were young (86% aged 20-35), educated (92% had attended secondary school and 24% had reached the university level). There was a more or less balance in gender, as 65% of the protesters were male. All of them spoke at least two languages (Arabic and French) and lived in urban areas. The young protesters (individuals aged 20-35) experienced serious economic difficulties, which forced them to live with their parents, and did not allow them to marry. As a result, they had strong feelings of frustration, compounded by a detailed knowledge of the *way of life* of young Europeans.

These youths had known nothing but their country's dictatorial regime and only president, and although educated, did not manage to develop a deep political analysis and a specific ideology. They went in the streets with no political culture, and no premeditated slogans (but the popular "*Dégage!*"[41]).

They confirmed neither being influenced by any specific political background, nor being influenced by activists, such as Islamists. They considered themselves as simple "*khobziste*" (bread seekers), claiming only better daily sustenance (but in fact also employment, public transport, clothing, leisure,[42] etc.).

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[41] I.e., "Get out!"

[42] This reminds us of the *panem et circenses* of ancient Rome.

That is precisely what set apart the North African protests: they were 'apolitical'. Political parties did play a minor role, but kept a low profile. Even the Islamist parties did not take part to the riots, and in the specific case of Tunisia, they entered the public scene afterwards, with the aim of capitalizing the revolution.

Lastly, most of the protesters interviewed declared being fervent users of up-to-date technologies, especially iPads, Blackberries and GPS related to Google Earth.[43] All of them were regular (daily, in most cases) users of Internet, Facebook, Twitter and other social networks.

The revolution as seen by the youth

I also conducted a series of interviews with young men implicated in the revolution events to better understand how they saw the revolution during but also after the fall of the dictatorial regime.

The youths in the revolution

Although they were known to be a 'quiet and indolent' people,[44] Tunisians participated actively in the events before and during the Jasmine revolution. They were the ones who managed to organize large-scale rallies in the central squares of the Tunisian cities. Lastly, they played a crucial role in mediatising any events, through the circulation of information, photos and videos via the social networks (Facebook, Twitter, private blogs). Each time someone was hurt or killed in a riot, photos and videos were immediately sent to the major television stations around the world (*Al Jazirah*, BBC, TF, or FR2).

As we underlined previously, the high level of education of the young enabled them to act as the messengers of the revolution. For that reason, many Tunisian and Egyptian young bloggers were often severely prosecuted. The most known case was Khaled Said, a young Egyptian tortured and executed publicly by two police officers in an Internet café in Alexandria in June 2010.

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[43] This system, used on mobile phones, makes it possible to localize the prisons where people are secretly imprisoned.
[44] See Ben Slama; also Mokeddem, 2012, p. 11

Even after the fall of the president Ben Ali, in a period characterized by a collapse in security,[45] young people played a key role in preventing looting and burglaries in private houses. In fact, they spontaneously organized themselves into neighborhood committees, blocking entrances to their neighborhoods during the curfew. They also largely contributed to the cleaning of the cities after the turmoil, disposing of trash (torn posters, burned cars, shell casings, barricades, tear bomb sockets, etc.).

In the first weeks of the rebuilding of the political scene, the young, who were accustomed to communicating with one other through the social media (Twitter, Facebook), commented on the first decisions taken by the provisional government, delving into the past of the Ministers appointed by the new leaders. Such actions lead to the dismissal of some of them just a few days after their nomination. For the first time in their lives, the Tunisian youth had concentrated power in their hands. In my interviews, I also collected some qualitative data concerning the way they see the revolution.

The representation of the post-revolution phase among young Tunisians

Despite the success of "their" revolution (fall of the regime, departure of the dictator, imprisonment of most previous, absence of abuses, low number of fatalities), young Tunisians remain today skeptical about their future. Young people having participated in the contests in the streets recognize that the transition to a more democratic political system requires the gradual development of a political culture that still has to develop in the Tunisian society.[46] But they feel that things take too much time to change.

Tunisian youth surveyed in March 2011 considered that the election of a Constituent Assembly was the next step, and expressed the wish to be represented there. They also claimed that politicians belonging to diverse parties tried to exploit the revolution and divert it for their own purposes.

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[45] During the two weeks following the fall of the dictator, the police forces disappeared, as they were pursued by the crowds. The security of the country was exclusively in the hands of the army forces.
[46] See Collins 2011.

A SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN SPRING?

A question often asked since the launch of the Arab Spring in January 2011 is the following: what effect will these popular eruptions against authoritarian rules have on democracy struggles in the rest of Africa? Will African heads of states in the same position as presidents Ben Ali or Mubarak[47] experience the rumblings of revolution from their young, urban populations? It is true that some Sub-Saharan African countries have been experiencing their own democratic surge in 2011-2012, with some advances in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Nigeria and Zambia.

Nevertheless, apparently there has been no Arab Spring in Sub-Saharan Africa, despite that Africa is plagued by the same woes: social tensions, political frustrations and high level of unemployment, especially among the youth.[48] Even the African Union (AU) has not shown any particular initiative or held any extraordinary summit to discuss the North African events. The last part of the study will examine this issue.

The demographic dimension

If we again consider the demographic dimension, there exist similarities between North Africa and Sub Saharan Africa. The next section will focus on youth, education and urbanization in Sub Saharan Africa.
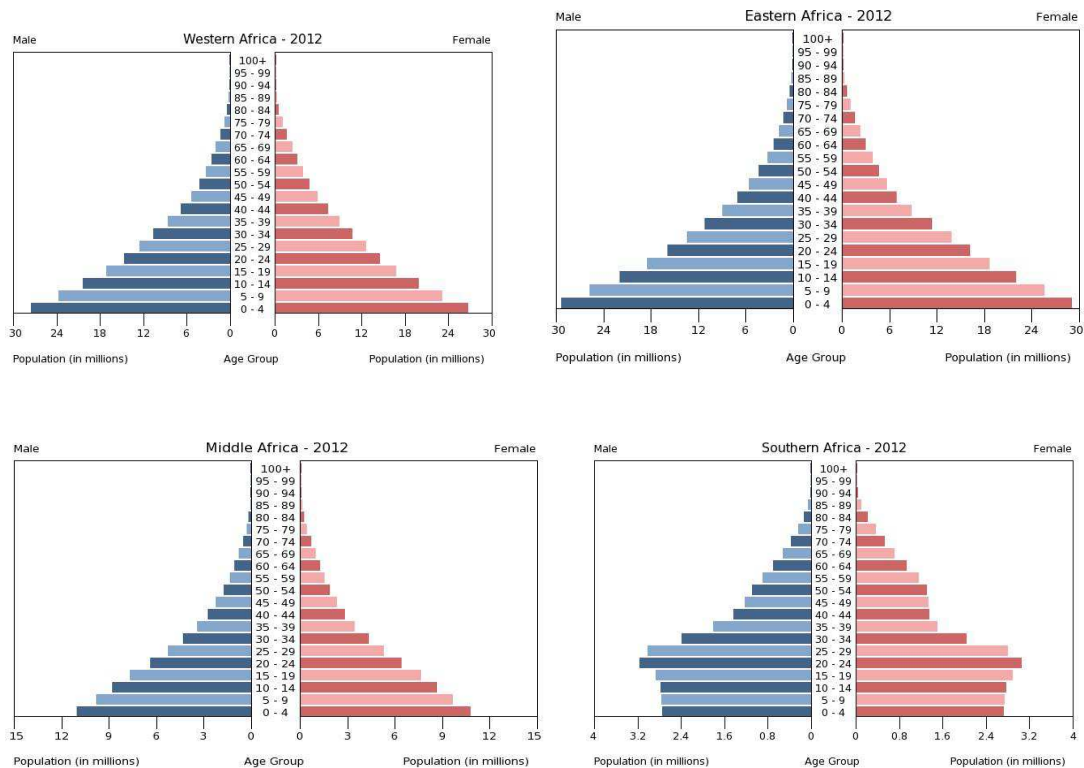
The youth factor

These are the age pyramids of Africa, according to the regions.
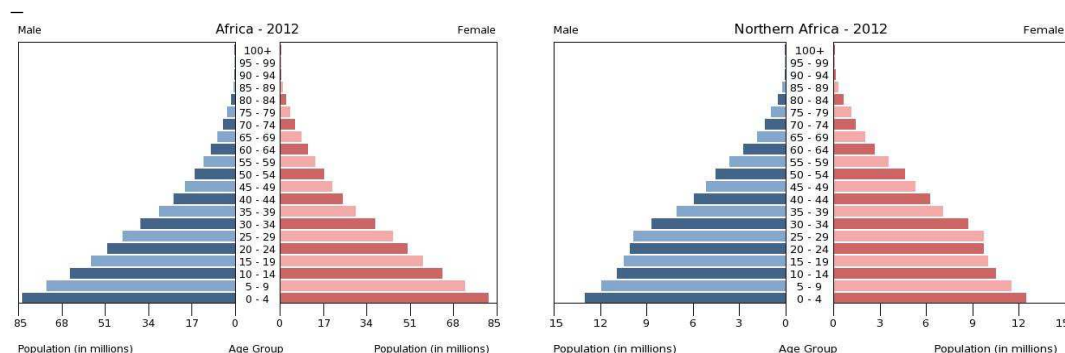
(Source: US Census Bureau, *International data base*)

We clearly see here that there are similarities between these age pyramids. In fact, whatever is the region, the African population is very young, as all pyramids are large in the bottom and narrow in the top. But we notice that there are two groups of countries. Western, Middle and Eastern African populations have a perfect pyramid shape. This is due to the high level of fertility. That means that in these countries, the population will stay very young for at least one or two other generations.

On the other hand, in Northern and especially in Southern Africa, we observe a quite different shape at the bottom, characteristic of a beginning ageing process. This is due to the fall in fertility rates in these two regions. That means that although Northern and Southern Africans are still young today, the proportion of elder people is going to rise in the coming decades.

In fact, TFR (Total Fertility Rates) in the various African regions are the following:

- Africa: 4.53 children/woman
- North Africa: 3.03 children/woman
    - Tunisia: 2.02 children/woman

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- Egypt: 2.94 children/woman
- Libya: 2.12 children/woman
- Western Africa: 5.22 children/woman
- Eastern Africa: 5.1 children/woman
- Middle Africa: 4.97 children/woman
- Southern Africa: 2.33 children/woman

We then have to consider separately the cases of Western, Middle and Eastern Africa on the one hand, and Southern Africa on the other.

**Western, Middle and Eastern Africa**

Discussions with academicians originating from Sub-Saharan countries revealed that the popular reaction to bad governance is also conditioned by a series of cultural behaviors and attitudes. In particular, in many Sub-Saharan African societies, there is a popular belief that there exists a certain political culture. If you are not happy with the government you accept it, because you know that some day you yourself could be part of this government and act in the same way. Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia are countries where such a perception of of the government is visible.

Corruption or bribing is also a factor to take into consideration here. In fact, it seems that offering convincing opposition leaders a position in the government is a way of co-opting them and thus to stop protests.

Southern Africa

The following age pyramids represent the populations of two North African countries having gone through a revolution (Tunisia and Libya), and of three Southern African countries (South Africa, Botswana and Namibia).

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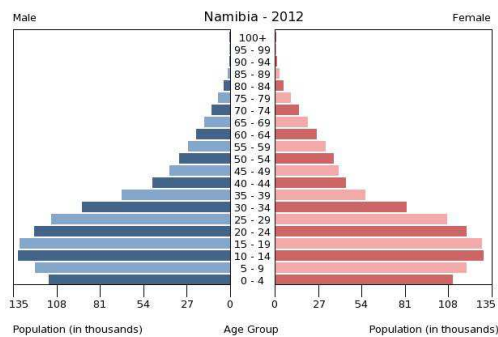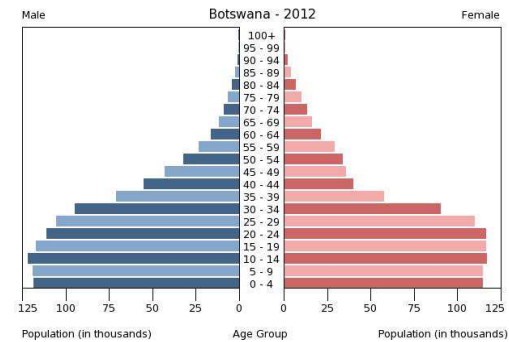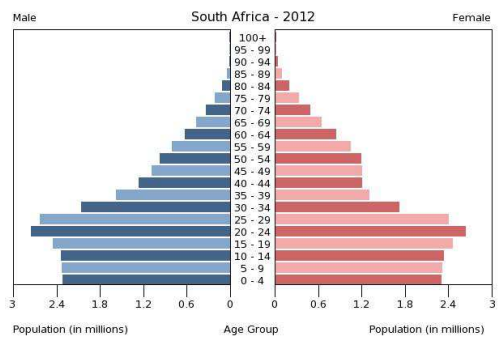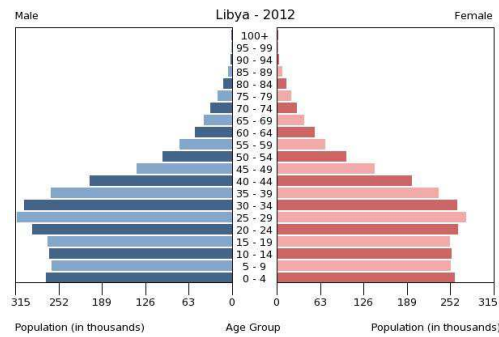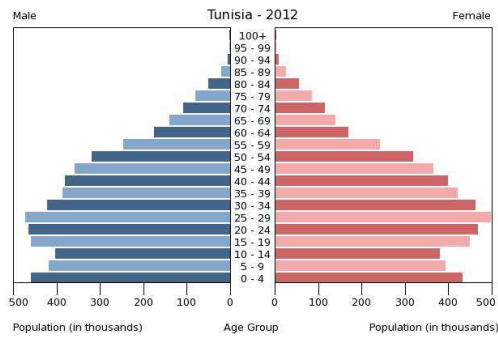
(Source: US Census Bureau, *International data base*)

We clearly see here that the age pyramids of the five countries have the same shape. In fact, we see in the lower part that there is a declining fertility, then going up we observe a more classical graph in the shape of a pyramid. The highest part of the pyramids is characteristic of countries engaged in an ageing process, due to a rapid decline in mortality and a rise in life expectancy.

So we could make here a reverse reflection: these Northern and Southern African populations have very similar age pyramids. So why didn't they react in the same manner with regard to revolutionary protests?

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One answer could be the differences in the social welfare system: it is very strong in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, while it is still to be developed in Libya and especially in Tunisia. In a country where the state provides a good welfare system, even when you are unemployed, you benefit of some kind of help, so you 'do not need to protest' in the streets. But when you have no education, no job, no possibility to use public transport, no leisure, and absolutely any possibility to integrate your own society, then violence seems sometimes to be the only way forward.

Education

Most education indicators show that the Sub Saharan population is less educated than the North African one. If we examine the education indicators, we observe a large gap between Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, gross school enrolment (tertiary[49]) is 34% in Tunisia and 32% in Egypt. In Sub-Saharan Africa, gross school enrolment (tertiary) varies from 18% in Cape Verde, 12% in Ghana and 11% in both Benin and Cameroon, to 2% in Chad and Eritrea, and only 1% in Niger and Malawi.[50]

When the population is more educated, it has a higher capacity of making political analyses and to react correspondingly. In this regard, we could say that being less educated, Sub-Saharan Africans are less keen on reacting to bad governance than North Africans.

Urbanization

Sub-Saharan Africa is less urbanized than North Africa. In most African countries, the population is mostly rural, with a human concentration in two or three megalopolises (e.g., Lagos, Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Nairobi, Luanda). In this case, what happens in the big cities is not immediately followed by those living in the rest of the country. If a major political event happens in the capital, it could take many days before the information reaches the countryside, and again many days before evoking a mass reaction. In the meantime, what happened in the capital has already passed.

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[49] Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown. Tertiary education, whether or not to an advanced research qualification, normally requires, as a minimum condition of admission, the successful completion of education at the secondary level.
[50] World Bank data.

If we take the case of Nigeria, for example: the country is divided into three parts by an imaginary, but sociologically real line: the North, the South-West and the South-East, each region having its own ethnic groups, religion, languages and behavior patterns.

The process is different in Tunisia, for example, because it is a small, urbanized country, and the major part of the population is interconnected and ready to act at the same time, for example in engaging in riots.

In addition, the Sub-Saharan megalopolises are a mix of ethnic and religious groups, which makes it difficult to reach consensus. Tunisian and Libyan cities, on the contrary, are smaller and more homogeneous, with the same language (Arabic), the same religion (Islam), and a common history. This makes it easier to create mass reactions, for example demonstrations in the major cities, on the same day and in the whole country.

Urbanization is not the same in North and in Sub-Saharan Africa. In North African countries, around 2/3 of the population since a long time lives in big or middle-sized cities. In fact, there is an ancient tradition of urbanization in Arab Muslim societies. The urban population is quite homogeneous, sharing one same culture, and citizens are connected and can mobilize to meet in big rallies.

In Sub Saharan countries, the major part of the population still lives in rural areas, and those living in the cities constitute a heterogeneous society, with different ethnicities, different 'tribal' groupings, different languages and different sub-cultures. They have then more difficulty in mobilizing for a common reason, for example to demand the fall of the regime.

The cultural dimension

North Africans prefer not to consider themselves as part of Africa, and even less of Sub-Saharan Africa, but instead identify as Arab, Mediterranean, Muslims, and in some cases Europeans! North African people feel closer to Southern Europe or Middle East than to Sub-Saharan Africa. It thus appears that there is still a significant cultural gap between North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The position of the African Union

Many factors could explain the silence, or at least the very divided opinion, of the African Union concerning the North African revolutions.[51] The weight of North African

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[51] See for instance Sturman 2012 and Mangu 2012.

countries in the African Union is very important. Libya, Egypt and Algeria provide 45% of the AU budget, with Libya's contribution alone representing 15% of the budget. In addition, Gaddafi's regime was known for its generous financial support to rebellions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger and Mali. Gaddafi was also a strong businessman, having invested in many African countries (e.g., Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Togo, Gabon, Zambia, Uganda). From that point of view, Gaddafi, who claimed for a long time to be an "*African prophet*", managed to make friends on the continent.

Secondly, there is a feeling that the African Union has never played a serious role in fostering democracy in Africa, partly because of intricate interstate politics. As Zounmenou noted: "The AU is made of a group of weak states, which has affected the overall functioning of the organization for many years. As a political organization, the AU can only be the reflection of its member states' own capacities."[52]

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[52] Zounmenou, David, A deafening silence from the AU, in *The African.org, issue 12*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, April/May 2011, p. 21.

CONCLUSION

In the 1960s-1970s, North Africa was able to insulate itself against the waves of popular protests that struck Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and later on Eastern Europe. Today the reverse is happening, and we have the feeling that what happened in North Africa did not seem to have much influence on Sub-Saharan societies.

The main hypothesis on which these reflections were based is the importance of the socio-demographic dimension of the Arab Spring. We have seen throughout this study that Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have socio-demographic characteristics that probably played a key role in supporting or enhancing the revolutionary process. But these conditions are far from being sufficient. In fact, although most Sub-Saharan African countries have similar characteristics, they did not follow the North African spring.

However, things may change. For that reason, and in light of these basic reflections, it would be wise for African leaders to consider seriously the needs expressed by young people from a new angle. More concretely, a couple of recommendations could be given on measures to be implemented:

- Governments, whether they are well-established or still in transition, should listen to the youths and take them seriously. If this category of the population is unprepared for adult life, and physically or mentally unable to perform its responsibilities, both in terms of production (economic, cultural, political) and reproduction (marriage, fertility, home care), the consequences will be costly for society.[53]

- Young Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans during the revolutions of the last two years demonstrated an unexpected and powerful energy. Now, as a second step, such untapped resources should be channeled into constructive action. Otherwise, this same energy might be diverted towards negative behavior such as vandalism, burglary, strikes or school protests, or extremist action.

- Democracy is still a new concept in the post-revolution North African countries, and the leaders should invest in understanding the youth and winning their confidence, especially when they represent the majority of voters.

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[53] UNICEF, *La Situation des Enfants dans le Monde*, UNICEF, New York, 2011.

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