

Revolutionary Youths

A study of the Iranian revolution in 1979 in light of the youth
bulge theory

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Abstract

Demographic changes have created large youth cohorts in many developing countries. These large groups of young people are claimed to increase the risk of political violence according to the youth bulge theory, a theory that has been used to explain the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. The paper uses a hypothetical-deductive method to test if the youth bulge theory can be applied as a means to analyse the outbreak of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and thereby offer an alternative to earlier explanations. By using a skewed comparative method, the paper tests if the independent variables; the existence of a youth bulge, grievance and over-urbanization, were present in Iran preceding the revolution. The paper concludes that there existed a youth bulge in Iran, that there were widespread grievances amongst the population and that the country had experienced a rapid urbanization process before the revolution. However, even though the paper concludes that the youth bulge theory can be used to explain the outbreak of the Iranian revolution to a certain extent, the paper does not claim that youth bulges are necessary nor sufficient in initiating revolutions, but rather that they increase the risk of their outbreaks.

Key words: Egyptian Revolution 2011, Iranian Revolution 1979, Youth Bulge Theory, Grievance, Over-urbanization, Youth Bulge.

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1 Introduction

Revolutions are an intriguing phenomena. They bring about hopes of a better future and promises of change. Different historical and contextual settings have offered different explanations as to why revolutions break out. In more recent times, the role of the youths have been portrayed as increasingly important in regard to societal change. When the Arab Spring swept through the Middle East in 2011, a vast number of theories emerged striving to explain the revolutionary wildfire that spread throughout the region. In regard to Egypt, the youth bulge theory was seen as one way to explain the outbreak of the revolution. However, even though the role of the youths has only come to be emphasized recently, youths have always existed and played a prominent role in actuating societal change. This paper therefore strives to examine whether the youth bulge theory can be used to explain less contemporary revolutions by researching the revolution of Iran in 1979.

2 Purpose and research question

In this research paper, we aim to examine whether there are similarities between what led to the outbreak of the revolution in Egypt in 2011 and the revolution in Iran in 1979, and strive to better understand what can initiate revolutions. A revolution, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is defined as a forcible overthrow of a government or a social order, in favour of a new system (Oxford Dictionaries).

Since the Arab Spring in Egypt, extensive research has been carried out in order to understand why the revolution broke out. The youth bulge theory, which places emphasize on demographic conditions, is one theory that has been offered as a possible explanation to the outbreak. The purpose of this research paper is therefore to test if the theory can be used to explain the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979.

Hence, our research question is:

- Can the youth bulge theory be used to explain the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979?

Due to the limited extent of this research paper, focus will be on the youth bulge theory and its linkages to the variables *youth bulges*, *grievance* and *over-urbanization*.

3 Theory

3.1 The youth bulge theory

Demographic factors have long been of interest in regard to research aimed at understanding security, instability and conflict (Urdal 2004, p. 1). It has been argued that population changes in general do not lead to instability or violent conflict, but that certain patterns in demographic alteration can actuate societal change (Goldstone 2002, p. 9). Furthermore, it has been argued that many historical events of political violence, such as the French revolution in 1789 and the English revolution in the 17th century, have been characterized by a high level of youth involvement (Goldstone 2002, p. 11; Urdal 2004, p. 5).

The youth bulge theory derives from broader theories of demographic studies (Goldstone 2017, p. 99), and aims to elucidate and explain how large groups of youths can interact with and have impact on certain security related factors (La Graffe 2012, p. 66). Demographic studies have become increasingly relevant due to the fact that many developing countries have experienced a decline in mortality whilst the fertility has remained at a constant high, thus resulting in disproportionately large youth cohorts (Urdal et al. 2011, p. 6). Large youth cohorts are deemed especially influential and important in regard to societal change, since young people in general often are more receptive to new ideas, new religions and therefore more likely to question and dispute traditional forms of authority. Furthermore, they often possess less responsibilities in regard to families and careers and are thus more likely to act drastically (Goldstone 2002, p.11). Youths are also believed to be especially significant since they often put large strain on existing social institutions, such as the labor market (Urdal 2004, p. 5). Factors that strain the labor market; such as rapid growth of the labor force in stagnant economies, abundance of educated workforce in societies lacking desirable jobs, and substantive urbanization, can be seen as problematic since they have been linked to an increased risk of violent internal political conflict (Goldstone 2002, pp. 4-5).

The youth bulge theory can be used to shed light on different variables and conditions that are affected by large youth cohorts, and different researchers place emphasis on different factors and perspectives. La Graffe for example argues that demography can affect factors such as unemployment, poverty, social unrest, urbanization and declining economic conditions (2012, p. 67). Singerman on the other hand links the youth bulge theory to social, economic and political exclusion. She furthermore stresses a concept she describes as ‘waithood’, a condition characterized by unemployment and delayed marriage, and argues that this condition causes frustration amongst the young population (2011, p. 9). Urdal uses the youth bulge theory to investigate how certain demographic conditions can affect what he describes as youth grievances, economic growth and armed conflict (2004, pp. 3-5).

3.2 Theoretical framework

Due to the limited extent of this research paper, it is impossible to process and discuss every variable and condition that has been linked to the youth bulge theory. Therefore, this paper will focus on the youth bulge theory and the variables: the existence of a youth bulge, grievances and over-urbanization. The research will use Urdal’s definition of youth bulges, i.e. large cohorts of 15-24-year olds relative to the adult population. The adult population will be defined as persons age 15 and above. The reason as to why not compare the youth bulge with the total population stems from the fact that many countries with swiftly growing populations have a tendency to underestimate youth bulges due to the fact that they often have very large under 15-populations which skew the demographic distribution of the population (Urdal 2004, pp. 1, 7).

Hypothesis 1: Iran experienced a youth bulge in the years preceding the 1979 revolution.

Grievances

The grievance perspective stems from Gurr’s theory of relative deprivation, a theory that claims that political violence can arise when people experience a difference between what they believe they deserve and their actual situation. According to the grievance perspective the outbreak of political violence can be

viewed as a way to protest against economic and political grievances (Urdal 2004, p. 5; Urdal 2006, p. 609).

One of the most significant reasons believed to cause grievances is extensive unemployment. Urdal argues that generations notably larger than previous ones often experience societal bottlenecks, where existing institutions become unable to process the populous youth cohorts. A non-functioning labor market is often described as source of grievance, since it leads to substantive groups of discontent and unstimulated youths whilst it simultaneously contributes to weakening the perceived political legitimacy of the societal system (Urdal 2004, p. 3). Unemployment is believed to be especially problematic in societies experiencing economic decline. It is also believed that grievances become more tangible if educational levels increase whilst unemployment prevails, since it may exacerbate the sense of relative deprivation and escalate political instability (Urdal 2006, p. 612; Urdal 2004, p. 4). Singerman describes this phenomenon as one that causes the youth to become economically excluded and emphasizes that grievance may not only arise in times of high unemployment but also in times when it is increasingly difficult to obtain what is considered to be desirable and good jobs (2011, p. 9).

Singerman also argues that grievances can arise when youths become politically excluded by authoritarianism or repressive state methods. A lack of political transparency and openness may have the result that grievances are left unheard or remain uncommunicated (Ibid, pp. 6, 9).

Furthermore, Singerman argues that grievances can grow as a result of youths becoming socially excluded whilst their lives are put on hold and they are caught between two life courses. She describes this phenomenon as *waithood* (Ibid, p. 9). Kovacheva et al. argue that *waithood* can be used to illustrate the complex situation in many Middle Eastern countries, where one-step transitions to adulthood through marriage or by starting new family households have been regarded as the norm. Swift demographic changes have contributed to failures of the welfare systems, especially in regard to education, the labor and housing market. This had come to complicate and delay traditional ways of transitioning to adulthood, and Kovacheva et al. argue that many youths are unable to progress to

adulthood due to the fact that the labor and housing market remain unattainable (2018, p. 441-442).

Hypothesis 2: The youth bulge in Iran contributed to grievances that motivated the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979.

Over-urbanization

It has been argued that over-urbanization strengthens the correlation between youth bulges and political violence. Over-urbanization occurs when a rural country's population becomes increasingly impoverished and urban ward migration occurs as a response to both rural population pressure and the perception of more favourable economic opportunities in the city (Shandra 2003, p. 311).

When considering migration from rural to urban parts of a society, youths are often overrepresented in the groups that choose to migrate. Thus, countries that experience rapid and extensive urbanization are often characterized by an unusually high crowding of youths in urban centres (Urdal 2006, p. 613). La Graffe argues that overcrowding not only causes but aggravates problems and grievances in societies when governing capacities are outgrown. The housing market is often affected by failed governing capacities, and an inability to provide affordable housing often leads to an emergence of informal housing, many times linked with inadequate and overcrowded living conditions (2012, p. 71). Urbanization not only represents geographical crowding but also institutional crowding, and it is important to note that urbanization frequently is interconnected with unemployment and economic marginalization (UN OHCHR 1). Therefore, urbanization many times leads to an increase in both grievances and experienced frustration (Goldstone 2017, p. 99).

Hypothesis 3: The youth bulge in Iran contributed to over-urbanization that motivated the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979.

4 Method

4.1 Research design

This research paper strives to elucidate if the youth bulge theory, which has been used to explain the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, is applicable in offering an alternative explanation to the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979. The paper will use a hypothetical-deductive method complemented by process tracing of the events preceding the revolution in Iran (Teorell-Svensson 2007, p. 247). The research will be of a comparative character, even though more focus will lie on the Iranian revolution due to the design of our research question (Peters 2013, pp. 38-39). Furthermore, we wish to outline that the purpose of this paper is not to generate a broad generalization about the relation between youth bulges and revolutions. Instead, we chose to design the research as a small-N study, only examining the specific cases of Iran and Egypt, as we believe that this can contribute to a more focused and deep analysis (Hopkin 2010, p. 286).

4.2 Operationalization of variables

Aiming to grasp the theoretical hypotheses in accordance with the paper's research question, we find it necessary to operationalize the variables. Therefore, the revolution will be managed as the dependent variable since we know that it existed in both cases. We operationalize youth bulge as the independent variable and strive to test whether it contributed to the outbreak of the revolution by highlighting grievance and over-urbanization as supporting independent variables (Andersen et al. 2012, pp. 32-34).

The purpose of the operationalization of the variables is to test the theory and evaluate if the correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable existed in Iran before 1979 in the way that the youth bulge theory claims that they did in Egypt preceding 2011. Thereby, we do not claim any causation between the variables. Furthermore, we believe that by undertaking a small-N comparative study, our choice of few variables aims to gain higher experimental control of the study (Collier 1993, pp. 106-107).

4.3 Choice of cases

We motivate the choice of cases for our study by drawing inspiration from the method of agreement. There are many noteworthy differences between the revolutions and their contextual settings; Iran was a monarchy at the time of their revolution whilst Egypt was a republic. The countries were dominated by different branches of Islam, Shiism in Iran and Sunnism in Egypt. Iran had, in comparison to Egypt, experienced an unprecedented oil boom in the years before the revolution. The revolution in Iran took place in the 1970s whilst the revolution in Egypt took place in the 2010s, thus in very different geopolitical settings. Iran is Persian whilst Egypt is Arab (Encyclopædia Britannica 1; Encyclopædia Britannica 2; Nationalencyklopedin 1; Nationalencyklopedin 2). Nonetheless, we are aware that there were similarities between the countries, but we believe that the differences between the countries preceding the revolutions outweigh the similarities, thus motivating our choice of cases.

4.4 Material, validity and reliability

Data has been collected from a mix of secondary quantitative and qualitative sources. As far as possible, statistical data has been collected from official statistic databases, such as The United Nations Demographic Yearbook (UN DYB), The International Labour Organization (ILO) and The World Bank. Relevant data regarding Iran has, due to the lack of statistical data from that time, been more difficult to obtain in comparison with data regarding Egypt. Thus, the portraying of the situation in Iran has to a great extent been reliant upon academic literature and research, rather than data from official statistic authorities. We are aware of the flaws in regard to the matter but have strived to collect data that has been published as close to the Iranian revolution as possible.

Due to limited economic means and the limited amount of time provided for this paper, it is hard to appreciate the validity of the research. Even though the youth bulge theory presents certain independent variables, it lacks measurable and established thresholds. In regard to improving the reliability of the research, future studies would benefit from attempting to collect data from primary sources. In this

research, this was not deemed possible mostly in regard to time, language barriers and the fact that the studied revolution in Iran took place almost 40 years ago.

5 Egypt and the youth bulge

It is unquestionable that there might have been multiple relevant factors that initiated the revolution in Egypt in 2011, yet strong arguments have been made that demographics played a prominent role. From the year 1950 to 2012 Egypt's population grew over 378 percent, and the population is expected to grow yet another 50 percent by 2060 (La Graffe 2012, p. 72). In 2009, Egypt had an adult population of 52 450 055 people. Out of this population, 33% were aged 15-24 years old (UN 2011, p. 161). From a demographic perspective, the Egyptian population thus possessed a notably large youth cohort.

Grievances

In Egypt, the unemployment rates had been relatively steady at around 10% of the total adult population since the shift of the millennium up until the revolution in 2011. According to the World Bank, 11.9% of the adult population were unemployed in 2010, a percentage that in itself is neither remarkable nor extraordinary (La Graffe 2012, p. 73). However, there had been a sharp increase in the percentage of unemployed who possessed an advanced education in only a couple of years- from 24% of the unemployed population in 2008 to 33% in 2010 (The World Bank 1). Furthermore, the tertiary school enrolment had nearly doubled in 20 years. In 2010 it was estimated that 30% of the population eligible for tertiary education were enrolled in tertiary schooling (The World Bank 2).

Even though the unemployment rates in Egypt had remained relatively steady in the years before the revolution, the dynamics of the labour market had been changed due to extensive political restructurings. In the middle of the 1990s the Egyptian government engaged in structural readjustments that were heavily influenced by neoliberal policies. The private sector was prioritized, which resulted in the Egyptian labour market experiencing a significant decrease of employment opportunities in the public sector. One consequence of this political restructuring was that it caused the informal sector, consisting of insecure and benefit-free jobs, to grow considerably. In 2006, the ILO estimated that more than 60% of all employment in Egypt was informal (Denis 2008, p. 34; Singerman 2011, pp. 5, 10).

Furthermore, youth unemployment rates preceding the revolution were notably higher than those of the adult population. According to the ILO 33% of the 15-24-year olds year in Egypt 2010 were neither employed, in training or in education. Out of the youths, 24% were unemployed that year (ILO 1; ILO 2).

According to Singerman, the substantial youth unemployment rates became especially problematic in Egypt since they hindered youths from moving from adolescence to adulthood. She argues that adulthood was equated with marriage in Egypt, and that marriage was only possible if economic necessities could be settled. The economic hardships associated with unemployment and informal jobs became troublesome in the light of increasingly high marriage costs, thus leading to a notably prolonged adolescence and a state of waithood (Kovacheva 2018, p. 441; Singerman 2011, pp. 10, 13).

The youths did not only face social exclusion but were to a high degree politically excluded due to state authoritarianism. The rule of Mubarak was characterized by corruption, extensive repression, unfair parliamentary elections and tight restrictions on political organisations. The political space was kept extremely narrow, and when it became clear that Mubarak was grooming his son to succeed him, prospects of political change were suppressed (La Graffe 2012, p. 73; Singerman 2011, pp. 6, 15-16; Swedenburg 2007, p. 6).

In addition, Egypt had not been spared from the recent global economic recession, which in particular had raised prices of basic commodities. Egypt's GDP per capita growth had annually grown from 2002 to 2006 and became relatively stagnant between 2006 to 2008. After 2008, the growth rates dropped drastically up until the revolution broke out (La Graffe 2012, p. 73; Singerman 2011, p. 9; The World Bank 3).

Over-urbanization

In 2012, Cairo was one of the most populated cities of the African continent and one of the most densely populated cities in the world (La Graffe 2012, p. 72). In the years preceding the revolution, nearly 25% of the population lived in Greater Cairo (Cairo, Giza and Qalyoubiya), resulting in one of the highest urban

concentrations in the world (Alfy 2016, p. 103). Between the years 2000-2010, the urban population grew about 1.9% annually according to the World Bank (The World Bank 4). La Graffe argues that the changing tendencies of employment forms notable in Egypt, from agricultural to service and industrial occupation, brought young people to the urban areas at unsettling rates (2012, p. 70). This pattern of migration, according to Alfy, contributed to create a precarious environment that enabled the outbreak of the revolution. In an attempt to further explain the outbreak of the revolution, he argues that large cities that have experienced waves of urban migration, risk becoming breeding grounds for various forms of social tension. The risk increases especially if the cities contain high percentages of educated and/or unemployed youths, such as Cairo before 2011 (2016, pp. 103-104).

6 The Iranian revolution

6.1 Background

Iran had experienced multiple episodes of political instability preceding the revolution in 1979. In the beginning of the century, constitutional reforms had been undertaken by liberal reformists in Iran attempting to develop a western style democracy. However, the new constitution was repeatedly ignored by the ruling monarchs and had little real effect other than to act as a reminder of the political fragmentation that existed in the country (Graham 1979, p. 251).

In the early 1960s the Shah instigated 'The Shah and People Revolution', a multi-step reform plan aiming to develop and modernize the country. The plan consisted of land reform and redistribution, nationalization processes and change of traditional societal power structures. Iran experienced extensive socioeconomic development during the time of the reforms, but the regime was at the same time heavily criticized and failed to gain support from the growing middle class, the lower class and the traditional clergy who experienced a sharp decline in influence and power (Abrahamian 1980, p. 22; Graham 1979, pp. 72, 136). In particular, the government's constant favouring of western trade weakened the bazaaris social and economic power, which caused aggravation and pushed the bazaaris into an alliance with the religious clergy. This unforeseen alliance came, together with university students, teachers, and other groups, to play an important role in the anti-Shah opposition (Keddie 1981, pp. 244-246).

The country experienced an oil boom in the beginning of the 1970's due to the Arab Israeli war and OPEC's price rise in 1973. Unfortunately, the high sums of foreign petrodollars that were thrown into the Iranian economy resulted in an overheating of the Iranian economy, increased inflation and failed to lessen the income disparity between the rich and the poor (Halliday 2001, pp. 674-675; Keddie 1981, pp. 175-176).

The rule of the last Shah of Iran has been described as authoritarian, corrupt and highly bureaucratic, with a widespread practice of violence through the secret

police and repeated attempts to diminish any forms of political pluralism. The Shah was criticized for disregarding human rights and individual liberties, but it has been argued that the election of Carter as president of the United States and his foreign human rights policies came to have positive effects on the situation in Iran. The Shah was also criticized for ruling in an arbitrary and dictatorial manner. He became increasingly unpopular after the CIA-influenced coup d'état in 1953 and was simultaneously slandered for being both an American and British puppet as large parts of the Iranian population regarded the country to be largely controlled by foreign powers (Abrahamian 1980, p. 24; Graham 1979, pp. 208-211, 233; Halliday 2001, p. 194; Jahanbegloo 2013, pp. 52, 54; Kaveh 2009, p. 38).

In the wake of the growing discontent with the regime and the Shah's reform program, one man drew advantage of the religious networks and came to represent the anti-Shah opposition- Ayatollah Khomeini (Jahanbegloo 2013, p. 61). Khomeini was able to unite a very fragmented opposition by highlighting common grievances and visions rather than pressing religious requirements (Graham 1979, p. 257; Jahanbegloo 2013, pp. 56, 61). Khomeini's incitement against the regime came to lead to his arrest in 1963, and he was later on sent into exile but despite this, the resistance towards the Shah continued to grow. In 1978 widespread strikes spread throughout the country and from this point the political developments unravelled quickly. In February 1979 after months of unrest, Khomeini was installed as the country's new leader after the ruling Shah had been forced to flee (Halliday 2001, p. 191).

6.2 Iran in light of the youth bulge theory

In 1976, which is when the most recent demographical data by the UN DYB preceding the revolution was collected, the total Iranian population consisted of 33 662 176 people. 18 704 147 people made up the adult population, and out of this population 34% were aged 15-24 years old (UN 1979, p. 162). Since Egypt was regarded to have a youth bulge in 2010, when 33% of the adult population were aged 15-24 years old (La Graffe 2012, p. 72), it is therefore possible to establish that Iran experienced a youth bulge in the years before the revolution.

Grievances

It is indisputable that Iran experienced major socioeconomic development in the period that led up to the revolution (Abrahamian 1980, p. 21), but many of these developments require a more in-depth examination.

Between the years 1953 and 1977 the educational system in Iran grew substantially. In regard to literacy there were vast improvements. In 1966, 76% of the adult population were illiterate. Amongst the youths, the literacy rates were slightly better as 62% were deemed illiterate (UN 1972, p. 530). Ten years later, in 1976, the illiteracy rates of the adult population had dropped to 63%. The literacy had improved even more in regard to the youths and “only” 43% were deemed illiterate (UN 1980, p. 680). The tertiary education also expanded, and in 1953 there had been only four universities with a total of 14 500 students enrolled in the country whereas in 1976, there were 16 universities and as many as 154 315 students were enrolled. At the same time, seen to the whole of the population, only 4,4% were enrolled in tertiary education in 1978, and the percentage of the population that attained higher degrees remained one of the lowest in the region. However, this did not mean that there wasn't a demand for enrolling in tertiary schooling, but rather that the educational system was unable to meet the demand. As an example, in 1976 as many as 290 000 university applicants competed for as few as 60 000 places (Abrahamian 1980, p. 22; World bank).

There is a tangible lack of data in regard to the labor market during the years before the revolution. However, the Iranian regime requested an Employment Strategy Mission from the ILO during the last development plan (1973-1978), which according to Scoville can be used to outline the situation of the labor market. The report paints a generally optimistic picture, but Scoville argues that it fails to acknowledge many problems that existed under the surface such as failed compliance with minimum wages, sharp drops wages for unskilled labor and a substantial spread of child labor. He additionally criticizes the Iranian regime for its inability to facilitate good jobs. Furthermore, there was a notable difference between skilled and unskilled labor, and by 1975 the shortages of skilled manpower in the emerging modern industries were starting to cause constraints on the country's growth. At the same time, there existed unemployment was significant amongst the unskilled workers. Scoville argues that many unskilled

workers were particularly affected by the economic recession during the mid 1970s and the ensuing development restriction policies imposed by the regime. According to Scoville, this caused the unemployment rates to soar in Iran in the late 1970's (1985, pp. 143, 147, 149-153). Unfortunately, the ILO report does not take youth unemployment into consideration.

It is estimated that as much as 31 billion dollars were spent on economic and social projects during the different development plans (Abrahamian 1980, p. 22). Pesaran argues that the period between 1963 and 1978 marks the longest period of growth the Iranian economy had ever experienced and the per capita income rose from 176 dollars to 2160 dollars. The GDP in real terms grew by 9.3% annually (1982, p. 504). Large parts of this economic development can be attributed to the immense increase in oil revenues. The rising oil revenues ignited a construction boom, and when the oil prices quadrupled due to the oil crisis in 1973, the regime initiated hurried and impulsive modernization efforts (Abrahamian 1980, pp. 21, 25; Pesaran 1982, p. 508). Many development projects were carried out without respect for physical limitations of existing institutions, and contributed to institutional bottlenecks and overwhelming shortages of steel, cement and electricity. Furthermore, the rapid development led to an unprecedented expansion of the private sector and an ad hoc diminishing of the public sector (Pesaran 1982, p. 508).

At the same time, the regime was indubitably guilty of enormous amounts of waste, corruption and irresponsible economic planning. It has been estimated that more than 13 billion dollars were embezzled through corruption during 1977 and 1978 (Abrahamian 1980, p. 22; Clawson 1981, p. 11; Graham 1979, p. 122). Additionally, the regime repeatedly prioritized the upper class and foreign companies through uneven distribution of economic means and a belief in trickle-down economics, thus resulting in a decreasing support from the middle class and the working class (Abrahamian 1980, pp. 22-23; Keddie 1981, p. 170; Pesaran 1982, p. 507). The modernization and development attempts hit the bazaaris especially hard, and Keddie argues that many of reforms were undertaken as attempts to weaken the bazaaris' political and economic influence over the Iranian society (Keddie 1981, pp. 244-245). According to Abrahamian, the modernization in itself did not contribute to create societal tensions, but the way modernization

was implemented did (1980, p. 23). Social exclusion arose due to the fact that the regimes politics contributed to make middle-class life difficult (Scoville 1985, p. 147).

As various attempts were undertaken by the regime in order to modernize the social structure in Iran, few attempts were made to develop the political structure. After the 1953 coup d'état, the Shah achieved political stability through oppression, and by tightening and narrowing the political base. There were no signs of efforts to increase participation or political tolerance, and the secret police continued to abuse, imprison, torture and execute political dissidents (Abrahamian 1980, p. 24; Pesaran 1982, p. 505).

The politics undertaken by the regime contributed to reinforce societal fragmentation in Iran. The regime protected the upper-class, whilst attempting to distance itself from and control any forms of dissidents. Students, despite their lack in numbers, were perceived as a threat to the system as they were regarded as young, idealistic and rash. The students were often categorized in to two groups; leftists and Muslims. Any resemblances of socialism were banned through legal measures, whilst the Shah attempted to control the religious youth by, for example, forbidding Islamic traditional dresses. These attempts at intrusive restrains of the individual freedoms, aroused opposition towards the Shah amongst many students (Keddie 1981, pp. 235-237, 248).

Over-urbanization

The regimes attempt to establish new economic policies, through the legislation of the land reform in 1962 took a different turn than originally intended. The land reform had the purpose of redistributing agricultural land from large feudal landowners to sharecropping peasants. However, the distribution between peasants was unequal and many peasants did not receive any land. Furthermore, the land reform strongly favoured foreign grain growers who were subsidized by world market prices over the Iranian farmers, who became a disfavoured class. As a result of the skewed land reform, a vast part of the peasants joined the escalating migration to the cities throughout the 1960s and 1970s. By late 1976 almost 47% of the country's population lived in urban areas (Keddie 1981, pp. 160-164; Scoville 1985, p. 149).

Due to the agricultural stagnation caused by the land reform combined with the major construction boom generated by the increasing oil revenues, the rapid migration of unemployed villagers to the cities came to result in a housing shortage. The lack of proper housing thus led to the emergence of large slums and shanty towns (Abrahamian 1980, p. 25; Scoville 1985, p. 149). In fact, the urban population rose by 63% from 1966 to 1976 (Scoville 1985, p. 149). This overurbanization clearly affected the quality of life amongst many urban families who experienced an increasing air pollution, power blackouts, traffic jams, overcrowding and shortages in food, goods and other services (Keddie 1981, p. 176). Furthermore, the overcrowding of the cities contributed to worsen living conditions and by 1977 the percentage of urban families living in only one room were 43% (Abrahamian 1980, p. 23.)

The fact that 3,8 million migrants moved to the Iranian cities between 1956 and 1971, created an impoverished and politically volatile sub proletariat. This group which primarily consisted of newly arrived immigrants who were young, unmarried and unskilled. They lived in the the slums and shanty towns with few amenities and suffered increasingly from the growing shortage of unskilled employment opportunities from 1976 onward and the rise in prices of basic commodities. The poor urban areas made life difficult and loud arguments and physical fights in the streets where one sign of the strain. Politically, culturally and physically, this group found themselves closer to the bazaar than to the modernized parts of the cities. Thus, they played an important role in the anti-regime protest movements in the outbreak of the revolution (Keddie 1981, pp. 176, 246).

7 Analysis

The purpose of this research paper has been to investigate whether the youth bulge theory can be used to explain the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979. In the years preceding the revolution, there was a notable youth bulge in Iran. The youth cohort in Iran was even larger than the youth cohort in Egypt before 2011. Thus, our statistical findings support the paper's first hypothesis: Iran experienced a youth bulge in the years preceding the 1979 revolution.

The empirical data presented in regard to Iran partially supports the research paper's second hypothesis: the youth bulge in Iran contributed to grievances that motivated the outbreak of the revolution in Iran in 1979. The empirical data illustrates that the Iranian society, in the years before the revolution, was characterized by a wide array of societal grievances. However, due to the unsatisfactory amount of data available from the time period it is difficult to draw any solid conclusions regarding whether the existing youth bulge was a primary source of grievances or not. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe that many grievances had been brought to the fore due to the extensive development plans instigated by the Shah, whilst others had emerged as a result of the unprecedented oil revenues that flowed into the country. The land reforms that had been presented during the reform plans had created expectations that the feudal land systems in the rural parts of the country would come to be eradicated. However, the land reforms came to establish and further deepen societal fragmentations as they had vastly different results for different people. The oil revenues sparked an unparalleled economic growth in the country in the beginning of the 1970s and came to fuel increased expectations for the future. The Iranian regime can however be criticized for failing to take advantage of the financial rise the country experienced, as immense parts of the revenue were wasted due to irresponsible economic planning, reckless prioritization, structural deficits and corruption. Additionally, the faith put in trickle-down economics also contributed to the fact that only a minority of the Iranian population benefited from the economic growth, and to that large parts of the Iranian population remained poor or marginalized. It was not only economic policies that acted to alienate large parts of the population, but the reforms aiming to reshape traditional Iranian power

structures came to have similar effects. These reforms acted to diminish large parts of the population that historically had had of great influence over the Iranian civil society, such as the bazaaris. Thus, the regime's reforms many times had the effect of increasing the perceived distance between the Shah and the Iranian population.

Due to the insufficient data regarding the labor market in Iran, it is hard to draw any reliable conclusions as to whether it could be regarded as a source of grievances or not. It is not unlikely that the economic growth might have contributed to lower rates of unemployment. However, given the speedy development of the economic growth in the country it is probable that different parts of the labor market were in vastly different states. One can argue that it is plausible that there was an increased demand of skilled workforce, and that the deficient educational system was unable to meet related demands that emerged. It is further likely that the labor market was affected by the oil crisis, and that Scoville's arguments regarding the high increase in unemployment right before the revolution can therefore be seen as credible.

Furthermore, we believe that the educational system acted to instil grievances in the Iranian society as well. However rapid the educational system expanded preceding the revolution, it is still clear that education was not available to the extent necessary to meet demands. For large parts of the population higher education remained unattainable, and even though illiterate rates sunk constantly they were still undeniably high. Relatively soon, it became clear that an increase in capital could not be seen as a self-sufficient solution in regard to the institutional and structural problems the Iranian society experienced.

The lack of political venues for voicing these perceived grievances did not amend the situation in Iran. There were no oppositional groups that escaped the oppression of the Shah, and there was no possible way for members of the Iranian population to protest or question the ad hoc modernization attempts that the Shah and his regime undertook.

In regard to the paper's third hypothesis, that the youth bulge in Iran contributed to the over-urbanization in Iran in 1979, it has been more difficult to establish

whether or not the youth bulge in Iran affected the over-urbanization even though it must be seen as probable. The empirical data presented supports the fact that the Iranian society became increasingly urban in the years before the revolution. Due to failure of the land reform and the stagnation that the agriculture experienced, the rural population turned to the life in the cities in hopes of a better future. Because of the rate of the urbanization, the cities quickly became over-urbanized. This came to greatly affect the quality of life amongst the urban population.

When comparing the situation in Iran to the situation in Egypt, it is possible to acknowledge both similarities and differences. At first hand, it is clear that the countries experienced comparable demographical conditions. Secondly, grievances existed in both societies. However, we believe that the level of education was one of the primary sources of grievances in the Egyptian society. The fact that the level of education increased amongst the population in Egypt, whilst there was no sign of a decrease in regard to unemployment provided a foundation to the perceived relative deprivation. Even though the educational level increased in Iran, it was still only relatively small parts of the population that were able to pursue an advanced education. Moreover, we believe that it is possible to argue that the reform plans and the economic growth can be seen as the primary sources of grievances in the Iranian society. They came to initiate a ripple effect that spread and shook Iran and its entire population.

Furthermore, we believe that the informal sector of the labor market truly affected the situation in Egypt. The lack of stable and secure jobs in combination with economic decline acted to establish and intensify economic grievances. The economic grievances in Iran can be traced to the discriminating economic policies that the Shah undertook and his prioritization of the regime, foreign actors and the country's elite. Moreover, we believe that the political exclusion that existed in the countries can be regarded as an important common denominator before the revolutions. It can be argued that the lack of political openness contributed to instil frustration amongst the population and to diminish any prospects of future change.

Additionally, we argue that there might have existed a form of social exclusion in Iran that can be compared to the phenomenon of waithood that has been linked to

the situation in Egypt. The waithood theory emphasizes the consequences of delayed marriage due to economic hardships, housing shortages and widespread youth unemployment in Egypt. However, we were unable to find any data regarding marriage or youth unemployment rates in Iran preceding the revolution. Nonetheless, we believe that it is possible to argue that the agricultural stagnation created an unfavoured class of young people that migrated en masse to the cities and contributed to housing shortage and the deterioration of the quality of life in the cities. Thus, this migration pattern and the consequences it led to can be seen as contributive to social exclusion and grievances amongst the youth.

Furthermore, we wish to argue that the societal bottlenecks in the countries emerged due to partially different causes. The societal bottlenecks in Egypt primarily emerged in conjunction to the labor market, and due to the fact that the labor market was unable to absorb the large numbers of youths in search of employment fit for their level of education. In Iran, the demographic factors played a prominent role in creating societal bottlenecks, but the situation was also aggravated by the extensive reforms, questionable modernization attempts and institutional restructurings that were carried out at a rapid pace.

Lastly, we argue that youth bulges are neither necessary nor sufficient in regard to outbreaks of revolutions.

8 Discussion

We believe that the youth bulge theory is of relevance when it comes to peace and conflict studies since it can contribute to broaden and deepen the understanding of political violence, e.g. revolutions. Historically, research has failed to thoroughly acknowledge youths and their significance in regard to contributing to societal change. Even though it has been stated that there was a high youth involvement in the French and the English revolutions centuries ago, the importance of demographic patterns has not been accentuated in the light of political violence until recent years. Considering the extensive growth of population that many countries around the world face today, we argue that it is essential to understand demographics and the implications it brings about. Many developing countries, often overrepresented in regard to extreme population growth, are faced with the difficulties of simultaneously handling modernization attempts, high numbers of youths and weak societal institutions. Thus, understanding demographic patterns might ease the management of societal challenges and pitfalls associated with development.

In addition to our result, that the youth bulge theory partially can be used to explain the outbreak of the Iranian revolution, we wish to emphasize the risks brought about by societal exclusion. We argue that phenomena such as over-urbanization contribute to create and entrench societal fragmentation and factors of risk associated with political violence. Recent research has argued that capitals and large cities in the MENA region are growing at precarious rates, ranking Cairo and Tehran as the largest metropolitan areas in the region. It is thus of great importance to acknowledge how societal restructurings can trigger and lead up to social exclusion, in order to avoid creating societies in distress.

We find the youth bulge theory contributory to our chosen field of research, though we believe that it is important to acknowledge some of its more prominent flaws. Above all, the theory lacks clear-cut definitions and we believe that it would benefit from a more precise specification. When we first started researching the theory, we found that different researchers brought about a variety

of different variables. One way to develop the theory would be to investigate, in order to establish, certain quantitative and measurable thresholds.

Due to the limited extent of this research paper, our research has been of a visibly narrow character. Concerning possible future research, we believe that similar studies might benefit from Large-N methods, in order to broaden the comparative aspects of the analysis. By comparing a larger number of cases whilst still only operationalizing few variables, we believe that one might be able to generalize and outline a more precise relationship between youth bulges and revolutions. However, we are aware that there might be difficulties associated with finding comparable and compatible cases, and the risks of losing contextual knowledge that are associated with Large-N studies.

9 Conclusion

Revolutions shake and reshape the societies in which they occur. Historically, they have thus often sparked interest amongst researchers who strive to explain and understand their outbreaks and results. We believe that the youth bulge theory can offer a new approach angle in regard to understanding what causes revolutions to break out. The existence of youth bulges, that can aggravate grievances and over-urbanization, can shed a new light on how one might explain revolutions. This study argues that the outbreak of the Iranian revolution can be explained by highlighting the coexistence of a youth bulge, grievance and over-urbanization. Though we can outline certain linkages between the variables, we are however unable to conclude that they will lead to revolutions in every given situation, and therefore have to settle with concluding that they increase the risk of their occurrence.

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