RUPTURES AND RIPPLE EFFECTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND

Editors **Mariz Tadros and Jan Selby**

Rethinking the Youth Bulge and Violence

Akram Alfy*

Abstract The dominance of a generation of combat age, high levels of education combined with high unemployment, failed cities, and the relatively long duration of the transitional period still constitute an appropriate atmosphere for the explosion of a new wave of youth violence in the Middle East. The author takes Egypt as a case study. Egypt witnessed an unprecedented spike in violence following the revolution of January 25, 2011. This article first examines the political violence through the lens of political demography, drawing partly on Henrik Urdal's theses on the impact of demographic factors on the risk of political violence, but more broadly documents and analyses the trajectory of youth movements' involvement with violence in relation to issues of employment, education and urbanisation.

1 Introduction

Several analyses have attempted to explain the growing political violence in Egypt since January 2011, most of them attributing the repeated clashes to political polarisation, economic decline, the security vacuum, the decline of state status and authority, the absence of social consensus, or the intensification of the class struggle. Some analysts have also focused on young people's sense of frustration with the hijacking of the revolution, first by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and later by the Muslim Brotherhood, and their attempts to reclaim their stolen rights and confront the aspirations of the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition to political and social causes, others have discussed what they see as a shift in the Egyptian character following the revolution, from submission and concession to rebellion and rejection. Writings have addressed the behavioural changes of Egyptians, the emergence of a culture of violence, and the escape from the grip of repression.[1]

In the context of this debate, this article looks at rising violence using political demography, which seeks to interpret political behaviour, including political violence, using demographic factors. The article discusses the nexus between youth cohorts' domination of the population

pyramid, growing numbers of young university graduates, and violence, in addition to the role of urban growth and urbanisation in increasing the risk of political violence. Finally, the article looks at how political instability and the extended duration of the transitional period have also increased the likelihood of violence, as well as other possible factors, such as previous experience of deploying violence as a method of contestation and the organisational structure of youth movements.

1.1 Combat age and the youth bulge

In 2013, the number of young people aged 15–29 in Egypt reached 24.38 million (CAPMAS 2013: 5), in a society where 54 per cent of the population was already under the age of 24. This fact in itself increases the risk of political violence, according to Henrik Urdal and Jack Goldstone.

According to Urdal, youth bulges in a country increase the potential and motives for political violence, especially if they are associated with other factors, such as high youth unemployment, a quasi-democratic system, and a high dependency ratio (Urdal 2006: 609). Goldstone believes that the potential for violence and political change is higher in societies experiencing the second stage of the demographic transition, which brings higher birth rates, lower mortality rates, and the beginning of industrial progress and service provision. This stage is also characterised by a high proportion of youth (aged 15–24) in the population age structure and a growing middle class of educated young people that the labour market is unable to absorb (Goldstone, Kaufman and Duffy Toff 2012: 9).

In political demography, youth bulges signify a high proportion of youth (young people aged 14–25) in the total population, meaning that society is young. If we observe Tsegaye Tegenu, whose definition of the youth bulge in developing countries includes ages 15–29 (Tegenu 2011), then youth in Egypt comprise 29 per cent of the population. This makes the country a good testing ground for Urdal's well-known thesis which posits that societies where youth comprise 35 per cent of the population are 150 per cent more likely to experience an explosion of political violence than countries whose population age structure is closer to developed countries.

In political demography, a youth bulge means that a cohort of combat age dominates the population pyramid, thereby increasing the chances of violence. Eric Neumayer observes that young males constitute the principal bloc of participants in violence, the same view adopted by Samuel Huntington, who found that people who fight other people are largely men aged 16–30 (Urdal 2006: 612).

The character of political violence in Egypt conforms to these hypotheses, as most of those involved in the violence are aged between 15 and 29. The ages of those involved in youth movements that have adopted violence is similar: Ultras football fans are typically aged 15–22, and most members of April 6[2] are aged 18–29, while the age of

Black Bloc members does not exceed 22 (both the Ultras and the Black Bloc are discussed further below). In violent clashes between February 2011 and June 2013, 80 per cent of the injured were aged 15–29, while 70 per cent of the dead belonged to the same cohort.[3]

The relatively high proportion of young people in Egypt has provided fuel to youth movements in recent years, and has increased the likelihood that these movements will resort to violence as the 'combat generation' dominates the field of political actors, a situation reflected in the competition among political blocs to recruit and mobilise the largest number of youth. The demographic rise of this generation comes as it declares its political triumph and its power to settle conflicts at the decisive moment, and for young people, the fastest means of conflict resolution is violence. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that the youth bulge in Egyptian society is what has driven youth movements to adopt the strategy of violence, or is what has increased the resort to use force to settle conflicts.

1.2 The young combatant: an educated person looking for a job

The massacre at the Port Said stadium on 1 February 2012, in which 72 members of the Ahli Ultras were killed, revealed several facts about these football fan clubs. Most importantly, they are comprised of young men with generally high levels of education. Indeed, most of the victims of the massacre were university students, including some at private universities, where annual tuition ranges from US$5,000–10,000. This came as a shock to many Egyptians, who assumed that these football fans were largely less-educated youth.

Yet, young people with a university degree or who are enrolled in university constitute the backbone of Egyptian youth movements that have used violence. This is also true of the Black Bloc; one of its leaders stated that those involved in this underground organisation range in age from 18 to 23 years old, and are all either university students or graduates.[4] University graduates and students also make up the bulk of April 6.

The Egyptian condition thus contradicts the thesis of many schools of terrorism studies, which in the 1980s and 1990s posited a correlation between low education and violence. It is, however, consistent with modern demographic theories that suggest that higher educational levels in young societies increase the risk of violence.

For Urdal, the spread of unemployment among university graduates provokes feelings of frustration and deprivation among a large segment of educated youth, which increases the potential for violence (Urdal 2004). Brynjar Lia attributes the growth in university education in several Middle Eastern countries to the rise in large cohorts of educated youth not absorbed by the labour markets in these countries, thus fostering a climate ripe for the recruitment of these youth into radical and violent organisations (Lia 2005). Similarly, Jack Goldstone posits that the likelihood

of violence by large youth groups increases with higher levels of education. He believes that an exponential increase in the numbers of educated youth helps foster a climate for political change, as the most educated youth are at the forefront of political violence in periods of political change. Richard Braungart supports the thesis by noting that unemployment in any society weakens the legitimacy and stability of the political system, which creates an environment ripe for the radicalisation of young people who have nothing to lose in the struggle for revolutionary gains.

Higher levels of education feed the sense of dissatisfaction among educated youth, who are more ambitious and expect to obtain a better income. In turn, this increases the gap between expectations and the reality of unemployment. Educated youth also have a greater sense of the possibilities of political influence. Thus real or potential unemployment among young graduates or university students increases the likelihood of dissatisfaction, instability and violence.

As for Egypt, according to the World Bank,

> During the last two decades, the evolution of educational attainment in Egypt has been one of democratization of access, particularly at the basic and secondary levels… An examination of three generations of 21–24 year olds, born between 1964 to 1967, 1974 to 1977 and 1982 to 1985, most of whom have already completed their education, shows that preparatory completion rates increased steadily from 43 per cent to 69 per cent and secondary completion rates from 38 per cent to 65 per cent. College completion rates among the same groups have more than doubled from 7 per cent in 1988 to 17 per cent in 2006 (Ersado 2012).

Some 332,776 students graduated from Egyptian public universities and 10,726 from Egyptian private universities in 2011 (CAPMAS 2013: 130–31), while in the same year, 1.7 million students were enrolled in these universities.[5]

The rapid increase in graduates of universities and institutions of higher education coincided with an exponential increase in youth unemployment, particularly among those with university degrees. According to official figures, unemployment in 2013 reached 12 per cent, or about 3.18 million people (CAPMAS 2013: 30). Unemployment was highest among the 20–24 age cohort, at 40 per cent, followed by ages 25–29, at 23 per cent. Unemployment among those with university degrees came in at 32.1 per cent.

These data clearly indicate that substantial numbers of Egyptian graduates have not been able to find jobs, which feeds their sense of frustration and anger at the regime and society. University graduates have positive expectations of jobs, a steady income, and class mobility. According to Dan LaGraffe, this frustration is reflected in heightened social and political alienation, the increased likelihood of instability, and a tendency to adopt radical ideas and behaviour (LaGraffe 2012: 72).

This contradicts the thesis of Paul Collier that posits that poorer, less-educated youth are more likely to join radical, violent organisations because of the low recruitment cost. It should also be noted that high youth unemployment increases the dependency ratio, which, Urdal notes, is a decisive factor for the increased chance of violence in communities (Urdal 2006).

In Egypt, substantial numbers of young university graduates are frustrated by the dearth of job opportunities and their inability to influence the political process and the ruling elite. This frustration is expressed as a generational clash, exemplified in a statement issued by the White Knights football fan club, which noted that the clashes with security were an expression of 'the battle of an entire generation that only asked for a normal life, only asked that it be the master of its own affairs, as they know their affairs best'. The statement noted that security practices against the fan clubs were not exclusively a war on them, but targeted an entire generation of young people who are longing to be rid of the gerontocracy with all its corruption, sordidness and misery.[6]

The commanders in this virtual generational war are educated youth frustrated by unemployment – a substantial youth bloc in the country. In Egypt, youth violence is concentrated in the capital and large cities, especially in the Delta, which is richer than Upper Egypt. This calls for a closer look at the relationship between youth political violence and urbanisation.

1.3 Failed cities and political violence

Violent clashes between protesting youth and security or between competing Egyptian political factions have been concentrated in Cairo and large urban areas. Of the 65 instances of socio-political violence documented by this study, through a systematic review of the daily *Al Masry Al Youm* newspaper from 11 February 2011 to 30 June 2013, 33 took place in the capital. Of the 16 most violent incidents, 12 occurred in Cairo, or 75 per cent.

Dan LaGraffe observes that the danger of failed cities, much like failed states, clearly figures in the academic literature on violence and security. LaGraffe cites a study from the National Intelligence Council noting that the shift from agricultural to service and industrial employment has brought young people from rural to urban areas at dangerously high rates (LaGraffe 2012: 70). The growth of urban areas in recent years in less developed countries has led to heightened pressure for equality and a growing sense of social grievance, making cities more vulnerable to instability. Large cities now hold greater numbers of educated, unemployed youth and are thus a centre for social tensions given wide class and social gaps, which are more visible in urban than rural areas. In addition, cities are closer to the institutions of power, which have a more palpable presence in urban areas. This opens up a space for conflict between angry, frustrated youth and a state unable to realise their aspirations – indeed, often perceived as the primary obstacle to a dignified life.

Egypt offers an exemplary model of centralisation, with 20 million people, or nearly 25 per cent of the population, living in Greater Cairo (the governorates of Cairo, Giza and Qalyoubiya), one of the highest urban concentrations in the world; the population of Cairo alone is approximately 8.9 million, or 13 per cent of the population.[7] According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), approximately 43 per cent of the population of Egypt live in urban areas, while 57 per cent live in rural areas. Urban areas in Egypt are growing at a rate of 1.9 per cent annually (2000–10). With annual population growth less than 1 per cent, this points to the continued migration from the countryside to the city, meaning that cities absorb hundreds of thousands of new inhabitants each year. Meanwhile, rural areas account for 61.4 per cent of all births, compared to 38.6 per cent for urban areas. The number of city dwellers in Egypt rose from 22.5 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2012, an increase of 65 per cent, representing 43 per cent of the total population (CAPMAS 2013: 8).

The availability of educational services and universities in the capital allows it to absorb large numbers of young university graduates, about 30 per cent of its residents according to unofficial figures. According to Richard Cincotta, the migration of large populations from rural to urban areas in Egypt over the last two decades played a contributing role in creating the environment conducive to the eruption of the January 25 revolution. The city offered youth the chance to express their aspirations and frustrations, to interact with the elite and the media, and to step out of the space of familial relationships and primary affiliations to the realm of peer relationships and direct interests (Cincotta 2012).

In this context, Urdal notes that high rates of urbanisation strengthen the correlation between youth bulges and political violence (Urdal 2006: 613). Goldstone explains that high urbanisation rates are associated with increased unemployment among educated youth and economic marginalisation. Rapid urbanisation is reflected in relatively higher rates of poverty and unemployment, two primary factors for youth political violence. Tegenu believes that urbanisation and rapid urban growth are directly linked to large concentrations of youth. He argues that youth migration from rural to urban areas therefore constitutes a primary factor for the increased likelihood of political violence, as urban youth with rural roots have a greater tendency to violence in moments of political instability.

The centrality of Cairo is reflected in the makeup of the youth protest groups under study. The study focused on the most important youth groups at the time (2011–13) and excluded the Islamist groups as they were addressed in Bakr's article in this *IDS Bulletin*. Young people from Cairo account for more than 35 per cent of the members of the Ultras football fan clubs, for both the Ahli and Zamalek clubs.[8] According to another report, there are 360,000 registered Ahli Ultras, with 90,000 of them, or 25 per cent, from Cairo, which is the most influential and

active branch.[9] As for the Black Bloc, a leader of the movement says that of 300 active members, some 200 are from Cairo. The movement itself first emerged in Cairo during the demonstrations of 25 January 2013. It also had a large group from Mansoura (Daqahliya governorate in the Delta), numbering 40 members.[10] The faction of April 6 that has resorted to violence is centred in Cairo, Alexandria and Mansoura.

Urbanisation and Cairo's centrality have played a fundamental role in the tendency of educated, frustrated youth to use political violence. Large cities are one determinant of violence in Egypt, which contradicts Urdal's thesis that cities play a secondary role in the eruption of political violence, whereas the countryside retains the great repertoire of youth violence (Urdal 2006: 624).

1.4 Organisation, ideology, and past experience

Past experience, organisational structure, and ideology are determinants of any group's propensity for violence and its capacity to adopt violent tactics. Among Egyptian youth groups, the Ultras are the only ones with the expertise and organisational form that make violent tactics a viable option. The experience of other youth groups is limited to the violent clashes with security forces during the January 25 revolution, especially on 27–28 January.

Organisationally, most youth movements are fluid and have no clear central leadership. This has given rise to overlapping memberships whereby a great many young people who participated in the revolution were simultaneously involved in multiple organisations rather than holding exclusive commitments to one particular group. This, in turn, has promoted incoherent action by youth movements. A member of April 6, for example, may also belong to the Ultras and the Black Bloc or a radical political organisation such as the Revolutionary Socialists. The political action of these young people was influenced by their multiple affiliations with various organisations and movements. At the same time, the individual experiences of these young people became the basis for youth movements' collective experience as opposed to building a collective around common ideology.

The Ultras are central to understanding youth mobilisation in Egypt on account of having the largest youth constituency in the country, with the exception of the Islamist movements. The Ultras are the most organised of all non-Islamist movements in Egypt. Any study of youth and violence necessitates a focus on the Ultras since they deployed violence prior to the January 25 revolution, and also in its aftermath. They were also key actors in the violent struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood and non-Islamist forces in the lead up to the 30 June revolution. The Ultras fan clubs appeared in 2007. The first was the White Knights, the first fan club in Egypt, followed by the Ahli Ultras, who first made their presence known in the stands on 13 April 2007, during a match between Ahli and Enbi.[11]

The international origin and development of the Ultras is uncertain, although some reports suggest that the first fan clubs arose in China and South America. Their appearance in Europe is associated with fans of the Croatian club Hajduk Split, who first exhibited extreme fan behaviour during a match on 29 November 1950 against the club's traditional rival, Red Star Belgrade, when, after the final whistle, Hajduk fans collectively and methodically stormed the pitch. Ultras groups then emerged in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fossa Dei Leoni, a fan club of Milan, arrived on the scene in 1968, while other reports indicate that the first Italian Ultras group appeared in Torino in 1951 under the name Fedelissimi Granata. The first to call themselves Ultras were supporters of Sampdoria in 1969, which is the same year that the Inter Boys appeared, an Ultras group supporting Inter Milan.[12]

Ultras in Egypt have adopted a cluster-like organisational form with a number of overlapping circles in contact with a central decision-making core.[13] This organisational structure works to manage Ultras activities, which involve massive numbers of young men, while also maintaining coordinated, consistent action. The main leadership and individual Ultras are linked by the capo, the leader of an individual section. The capo administers the affairs of a cluster group containing hundreds of fans in a particular area, while also coordinating with the leaders of other clusters. The capo's role is clear in cheering activities during football matches, when individual sections each assume a specific role, and the capo is responsible for making sure his section does its part of the exercise in synchrony with the other groups. During matches, the capo leads the cheering and chants, and one can observe clear coordination between capos and between the capo and his section.

According to Mahmoud Abduh Ali,

> The Ultras have no president, but rather a group of founders who quickly recede into the background when the group is able to stand on its own feet. Action within the Ultras is directed by small working groups (top boys), each of which is responsible for organizing group activities such as the design and execution of murals and placards, leading chants in the bleachers, arranging trips, and overseeing the group's financial resources.[14]

This organisational structure and its capacity to support synchronised, coordinated activity is reflected in the Ultras' ability to stage acts of coordinated, sudden violence, as was seen in January 2013, when the fans paralysed the metro system in the capital on the eve of the sentences handed down to defendants in the trial for the Port Said stadium massacre.

The Ultras' adoption of violent tactics has been further fostered by their experience in engaging with security forces since 2007. Elgohary says,

> Since the establishment of the groups in Egypt, the police have tried by all means to contain Ultras' activities in and outside of the stadium. Before the revolution, Ultras members would be subjected

to demeaning searches when entering the stands and the confiscation of items used during the cheering such as flags, banners, and placards for the synchronized entrances. They were even prohibited from bringing in bottles of water to the bleachers.[15]

The Ultras had a generally hostile relationship with the police due to the latter's apprehensiveness, with security fearing potentially uncontrollable violence on the pitch and the fans' capacity to mobilise. Security thus used violence to counter the Ultras. In turn, the Ultras groups adopted a single anti-police slogan that appeared frequently in their graffiti and their synchronised entrances to the bleachers: All Cops Are Bastards, or ACAB.

This provides a window into the ideas underpinning the Ultras. The fan clubs have no coherent ideology, but, in Egypt, are based on two principal ideas: loyalty to a particular football club and rebellion. According to Elgohary,

> The Ultras' strong sense of belonging can be explained by the state of alienation rampant not only in Egypt, but in many other Arab countries – a sense of alienation from the state. These young people thus inevitably created an entity or idea to belong to.[16]

The second pillar of the Ultras' identity is rebellion, which entails both a rejection of authority and a hostility toward security forces.

In this context, many note that Egyptian Ultras groups have been penetrated by various ideological organisations, most prominently the Ahli Ultras by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis loyal to Hazem Salah Abu Ismail.[17] Although this seems incompatible with the main purpose of the Ultras groups – namely, supporting football clubs – young people's multiple organisational affiliations, discussed above, mean that many Ultras capos also belong to political groups, a fact that led the media to make these allegations of penetration. Overall, however, Ultras groups in Egypt are not associated organisationally or ideologically with any political factions, governed only by the all-important ideas of club loyalty and rebellion.

The Black Bloc was established formally in 2012, specifically after Mohamed Morsi won the presidency. Its *raison d'être* was to bring down the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, and one of its key tactics was to attack the Brotherhood's economic base. The founders of Black Bloc groups have also adopted a cluster-like organisation, with a separate leadership for each cluster that is careful not to reveal the identity of members to any other group. The founding principles of the Black Bloc are rebellion and a rejection of Muslim Brotherhood authority. Indeed, the one thing members share is their hostility to the Brotherhood. The group's founders chose not to adopt a specific ideology to better allow the recruitment of young people from various political movements and factions, motivated and united by the goal of bringing down Brotherhood rule.

Young people in the Black Bloc borrowed the group's name, slogan, and dress code from European and American anarchist groups that emerged in the 1980s, but did not adopt the ideological framework of the latter, largely because they sought to create propagandistic hype through the internationally-known name, slogan and garb. Perhaps the main shared feature of the Egyptian group and the Western movements is the use of violent tactics. The activists were initially involved in peaceful movements and sit-ins, but found that peaceful protest was unable to bring the change they desired; they thus turned to violence. The notoriety that accrued to Black Bloc groups due to their use of violence in the Seattle demonstrations of 1999 and the G8 conference of 2007 was replicated in Egypt, as the Black Bloc became a constant media presence soon after its establishment and following its use of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood in the first half of 2013.

The Black Bloc in Egypt was short-lived, lasting no more than six months. It grew out of Facebook pages for the so-called 'Black Revolutionary Bloc' after groups of Muslim Brotherhood members attacked protestors from secular parties and movements at the Ittihadiya presidential palace in December 2012; and in tandem with the emergence of Hazimun militias (followers of Hazem Salah Abu Ismail), who surrounded Media Production City, the home of satellite channels' studios in Cairo. Discussions on the Black Bloc's Facebook pages revolved around the importance of standing up to Islamist militias, and its first statement stressed that its goal was to 'bring down the Muslim Brotherhood regime and its military arms'. Notably, the group said that it would not accost police and army personnel, but it warned that the Black Bloc would not hesitate to respond to the Ministry of Interior if the latter confronted it. The first street appearance of Black Bloc youth came on 25 January 2013, during celebrations of the second anniversary of the revolution, when dozens of them assembled in downtown Talaat Harb Square wearing the group's signature black clothing and masks.

Organisationally speaking, the Black Bloc adopted a cluster-like structure, forming 14 separate groups of 20–30 individuals, with members of each group unknown to the others. This structure gave the group freedom of movement and made it more difficult to identify its leadership. The previous violent experiences of Black Bloc members were limited to clashes with police in January 2011 and, later, clashes on Mohammed Mahmoud Street in November 2011.

The April 6 movement was established by a group of young people belonging to different ideological and political schools of thought, most of them without any previous background in politics or political action, following the labour strike in Mahalla al-Kubra on 6 April 2008. The April 6 movement had made a call on Facebook for a nationwide strike to express opposition to the 'inheritance of the presidency' from Mubarak to his son, Gamal, and to protest the capitalist policies of the Egyptian government. The group gained renown in the 2011 revolution

when many of its young people led demonstrations and it became an icon of the Egyptian revolution.

The organisational form of April 6 is similar to that of European social movements, with a central leadership and individual groups in each area led by local leaders with decision-making authority. April 6 is an open organisation and sets no conditions for membership, making it more of an umbrella youth organisation. This relatively loose structure and the absence of a specific ideology makes it more of a social movement than a narrow party formation. Its structure also enabled the movement to avoid explicitly defending violence although several of its members were involved in violent clashes with security forces during demonstrations. In principle, the movement is committed to non-violence, as the adoption of tactical violence would diminish its broad membership and undermine its flexible organisational structure.

As is clear from this analysis, Egyptian youth movements involved in either offensive or defensive violence had no specific ideological framework other than an amorphous notion of rebellion. This contradicts Della Porta's thesis that violence requires a rejectionist ideology (Della Porta 2009). Rather, for these movements, the main factor for the use of violence was a confrontation with a specific opponent – for Ultras, the police and for the Black Bloc, the Muslim Brotherhood. In contrast, the broad umbrella-like nature of April 6 acted as a curb on violent tactics, although a great many of its members were involved in fierce clashes with security forces or the Muslim Brotherhood.

2 Self-described view of violence

This study has looked at several factors for the increasing turn to violence by youth protest movements in Egypt following the January 25 revolution, including the population age structure, higher levels of education combined with the inability of the market to absorb millions of new graduates, the failure of cities to absorb contradictions, the transitional period as a critical phase that permits the emergence of violence as an option to resolve pressing political and social issues, shared experience, and the adoption of a strategy of rebellion. But understanding the violence of youth movements in Egypt also requires understanding how young people involved in these movements see violence and examining the stance of various movements on violence. Sole reliance on an objective analytical framework that ignores the subjective risks drawing mistaken conclusions about Egyptian youth movements' general predilection for violence.

An analysis of field interviews and data about youth movements reveals that there is a clear tendency to reject violence in political action and, indeed, a recognition that the success of the Egyptian revolution in removing Mubarak was due to its peaceful nature. Even members of the Black Bloc boast that they are 'the kings of non-violence',[18] noting that no person was killed in their attacks on Muslim Brotherhood property and offices between January and June 2013. In addition, all of

those involved in protest movements stress that it is security forces that typically start the violence and that their violence is purely defensive.

In this context, justifications for violence are limited to self-defence. Hisham, a 27-year-old photojournalist and former Revolutionary Socialist, who was wounded more than once in violent clashes, says,

Our violence was a response to the violence of the other side, whether security, paid thugs, the Brotherhood, or regime loyalists. The other side was always the one to start the violence so we defended ourselves and protected the other participants in the march.[19]

Hisham justifies his involvement in violence, saying,

I'm against violence. I would leave home to take part in a peaceful march, but I'd be angered by the actions of the police or the other side and see people in our march killed and injured. Then I'd decide to join the fray and counter the attack and even try to get even and avenge those who were killed or injured.

This highlights another motive for violence – revenge – in addition to the defence of protests and demonstrations.

The picture is not complete, however, without a discussion of intractable elements within marches or demonstrations organised by youth movements. Hisham states,

There were in fact thugs and [homeless] street children in the marches who would sometimes start the violence. But we can't stop anyone from taking part in the march. Anyway, the police and the Brotherhood also used thugs and street children.

Hisham reached a clear conclusion based on his experience with violence during demonstrations:

The violence did not help us realise our goals. In fact, it ended with more dead and wounded, criticism of young people, and allegations of thuggery and vandalism. The ideal solution is peaceful action and escalation through strikes or civil disobedience to achieve goals.

Hisham's words distil the trajectory of an ongoing debate among youth groups in Egypt. It starts with the assertion that violence is purely defensive, but then goes on to affirm the use of violence for revenge, followed by the admissions that thugs and homeless children in their own protests helped to inflame the violence. It concludes with a recognition that violence had negative consequences for the achievement of youth movements' ultimate goals. This ongoing dialogue, heard among young people in Egypt, has led to a critique of the use of violence. According to Della Porta, the strategy of violence arises from a collective debate, the result of a dynamic process of engagement between social or political groups. In our case, however, the social debate and engagement between youth groups has ended in a rejection rather than an adoption of violence by the majority.

This does not mean that more radical voices do not exist that hold to the necessity of violence in the face of the police and political opponents, the focus of this study. Islam, a 22-year-old humanities graduate and a fixture of political demonstrations since January 25, is a member of this minority:

> The Interior Ministry was and remains criminals and killers, and until it is restructured and reformed, fighting and resisting it is a revolutionary duty. Blood is the fuel of revolutions and the blood of the dead is an incentive to stand firm in the face of the authority. It's a gain.[20]

Islam defends the use of violence as the sole means of changing the regime and countering the security apparatus in the country. He supports the idea of vengeance from a somewhat different perspective:

> People from popular areas get involved in violence because they've been oppressed, marginalised, and tortured in police stations, so they have a longstanding grudge against the police.

Vengeance as a motivator is particularly striking among young people who are involved in violence in protests and demonstrations. Motazz, a 21-year-old graduate of a social service institute, emphasises the death of his friend during a post-revolution demonstration as a reason for his use of violence:

> I saw my best friend die in front of me and I decided to take part in all the violent demonstrations. Even though I recognise that violence only leads to more bloodshed, I'm venting the grief within me.[21]

Shadi, a 22-year-old Coptic university graduate who belongs to a liberal party, speaks with the same logic:

> I've seen friends killed during the events of Mohammed Mahmoud, the Cabinet building, and Maspero, and I've seen people who've been blinded by the police, so I was forced to turn to violence because of these bloody scenes.[22]

In contrast, 29-year-old Sherif Abd al-Younis speaks of violence more as a defensive act:

> We aren't thugs. We're defending our right to life against those who want to ground us down yet again [the Muslim Brotherhood].[23]

These young people speak largely for a small segment of radical groups within April 6 or left-wing formations, and they have largely been involved in demonstrations only since the January revolution. Their use of violence is predicated on the logic of self-defence and taking revenge on the security apparatus. This language differs from that used by young Ultras who employ violence. A.A., a 20-something-year-old member of the Ahli Ultras who asked to remain anonymous, says,

> Fighting with the Interior Ministry is just something I like to do, even if they haven't done anything. The violence always used to start with the police, but later we started it because we knew in advance that security would attack us.[24]

This view is consistent with the Ultras' perception of themselves as a vital part of the Egyptian revolution that is always willing to engage in violent confrontations. The clashes that took place on Mohammed Mahmoud Street, near to Tahrir Square, involved violent confrontations between youth protestors and the security forces of the Ministry of Interior. The *Al Masry Al Youm* quoted one Ultras member as saying,

> We're not afraid of clashes. The true Ultras member is not afraid. In fact, some of us are happy to be injured because that becomes a memento for him and his [Ultras] brothers.[25]

These, then, are young people who consider the organisation they belong to as more of a brotherhood and see clashes and conflict as part of its doctrine of protest.

Ironically, the Black Bloc, according to one member, see themselves as 'masters of non-violence', saying,

> *The movement did not kill or injure any person and attacked no government institution or building. It was always careful to avoid state property. We largely use Molotovs and birdshot, while the use of firearms is limited to solely threat and protection.*[26]

According to another Black Bloc member, in a testimony given to researcher Hani al-Aasar,

> Violence against the regime [the Brotherhood regime] is legitimate because it is violence directed at an illegitimate regime. Violence has become the only way to express one's opinion and resist the special organization [i.e. the Brotherhood military wing].[27]

The views of several young men involved in clashes and acts of violence clearly indicate that the major justification for violence is revenge, followed by self-defence. It is also clear that there is no coherent ideology or ultimate goal for the use of violence outside of an attempt to punish police. The punitive aspect is how young people justify the violence to themselves, without the need to adopt a clear political objective. Some interviewees did discuss the need for violence to create 'chaos' which might be necessary to curb attempts by the regime to control and suppress liberties, but even this supposition is not based on an integrated political project that employs political violence as a tool. This limited view of violence among the participants themselves makes it impossible for them to maintain the conflict for a period of years. Ultimately, the absence of a youth organisation that explicitly adopts violence as a tactic to realise its political project reduces the risk of continued violence or the emergence of new forms of violence. On the contrary, it indicates that the main arena for violence will remain random violence motivated by a desire for revenge or self-defence.

3 Conclusion

There is no positive correlation between youth movements and violence in Egypt. Youth movements that emerged outside the political Islamist groups resorted to violence occasionally, such as the Ultras and the April 6 movement, while movements that exclusively deployed violence as the only strategy of engagement were more likely to form and then disappear again, such as the Black Bloc. It is a constellation of factors that made the youth bulge predisposed to resorting to violence in the post-2011 transitional period, most notably the high percentage of education among young people, and the sizeable proportion of youth who migrate to the city in search of employment. Against the backdrop of the military assumption of power in the aftermath of the 30 June 2013 ousting of President Morsi, and the confrontation between political Islam and the state, the author believes that youth movements' resorting to violence will significantly decrease.

Notes

* Researchers Ishaq Essa and Hind Magdi helped gather data for this study; Hind Magdi conducted the field interviews with members of youth movements used in this article.
1 See Mohamed Abdelaziz, *Youth and Silent Protest in Egypt*, 23 October 2015, www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/youth-and-silent-protest-in-egypt and Amr Hamzawy, 'Youth and Daesh', *Al Shorouk* newspaper, 24 November 2015.
2 The April 6 movement was formed in 2008 by young people who initially used Facebook and social media to build a network of resistance to authoritarian rule, but also combined this with street activism. In April 2008, the April 6 movement called upon citizens to show solidarity with the workers of Mahalla al-Kubra (a town renowned for its textile factories), who were demanding their economic rights. See Ezbawy (2012) for a full panoramic overview of the different youth movements, as well as the profile of the April 6 movement.
3 Data collated by the author.
4 Interview with a leader of the Black Bloc who prefers to remain anonymous due to the underground, illegal nature of the organisation.
5 CAPMAS, September 2012.
6 White Knights statement published in *Al Masry Al Youm*, 24 October 2013, www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/331842.
7 Cairo governorate portal, www.cairo.gov.eg/MainPage/DispProvinceInLines.aspx?ID=5.
8 Interview with a leader of the Zamalek White Knights.
9 *Taqrir: majmu'at al-Ultras tajdhIb al-sasa wa tuqliq al-sulta*, CNN Arabic, 25 February 2013, http://arabic.cnn.com/2013/middle_east/1/26/ultras.egypt/.
10 Interview with a Black Bloc leader in Cairo, 29 October 2013.
11 'Ultras: al-nash'a wa al-tarikh', *al-Ahram Misa'I*, 25 September 2011.
12 Hassan Mestikawi, *Yuhaqqiq al-Ultras: al-intima' al-mutatarrif*, 10 September 2011.

13 Elgohary, 'Kayf yumkin an nafham al-Ultras?', *Jadaliyya*, 14 April 2013, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11119.

14 Ali, 'al-Ultras: al-tawajjuhat al-siyasiya li-jumhur kurrat al-qadam fi Misr', *al-Siyasa al-Dawliya*, al-Ahram, www.siyassa.org.eg/NewsContent/2/107/1939.

15 Elgohary, 'Kayf yumkin an nafham al-Ultras?', *Jadaliyya*, 14 April 2013, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11119.

16 Elgohary, *ibid*.

17 Abu Ismail is a well-known Egyptian Salafi who ran for president in 2012 before being disqualified due to his mother's US citizenship.

18 The Black Revolutionary Bloc Facebook page, although it has currently been closed down www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdXmU8Kf8HM.

19 Personal interview, Cairo, with a member of the Black Bloc (20 August 2013).

20 Personal interview, Cairo, with a member of the Black Bloc (20 August 2013).

21 Personal interview, Cairo, with a member of the Black Bloc (20 August 2013).

22 Personal interview, Cairo, with a member of the Black Bloc (20 August 2013).

23 Quoted in an Agence France-Presse (AFP) story, *Naqmat shabab al-thawra 'ala al-Islamiyin fi Misr tazdad*, 23 March 2013.

24 Personal interview, Cairo (20 October 2013).

25 *Al Masry Al Youm*, 23 November 2011.

26 Personal interview, Cairo (15 October 2013).

27 al-Aasar, *al-'Unf al-siyasi fi Misr min isqat Mubarak ila muwajahat Mursi*, Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, http://acpss.ahramdigital.org.eg/News.aspx?Serial=118

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