

## JEREMY YOUNG DISCUSSES RESULTS OF MANATT FELLOWSHIP RESEARCH

# A PLAGUE ON DEMOCRACY - HIV/AIDS

Interview by Anna Prabhala

Jeremy Youde is the Charles and Kathleen Manatt Democracy Fellow at IFES this year. He talks to staff member Anna



Prabhala about his research on how HIV/AIDS is taking a toll on political stability in Africa. Youde spent 6 weeks this summer at the F. Clifton White Resource Center researching linkages between

health and his twin areas of academic interest—democratic participation and Africa. Youde is a doctoral student in international politics at the University of Iowa. Each summer, the Manatt Fellowship provides students from universities in the Midwest with an opportunity to conduct election-related research at IFES' Resource Center.



*What made you choose this subject area of research?*

When I was an undergraduate studying abroad in Zimbabwe, I did a research project on the economic and social impacts of

HIV/AIDS in that country. I have also done a lot of work with HIV/AIDS groups in my hometown of Cedar Falls, Iowa, and during college. Most of my work has focused on issues of democratization and Africa. This research topic gradually took shape after my arrival at IFES and during my several conversations with IFES' Africa and the Near East staff. HIV/AIDS and democratization in Africa seemed an ideal opportunity to combine my personal and academic interests, while allowing me to explore a new area that could benefit IFES' programs on the African continent.

*What prompted you to pick Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe as the final candidates for your research?*

These five countries combine two important features: high infection rates and similar experiences with democratic practices. The adult infection rates in these five countries range from 20 to 35 percent. At the same time, all five are at least nominally democratic; they hold regular elections and allow some measure of multi-party competition. This combination makes them ideal for researching connections between HIV/AIDS and democratic stability and legitimacy.

*What are the main findings of your research?*

Basically, HIV/AIDS poses a looming threat to the democratic legitimacy and stability of African states due to three factors:

- First, the chances for electoral fraud and manipulation are increased due to voter registration laws that make registration difficult and increased chances for "ghost voters" to appear on voter rolls.
- Second, the likely economic decline further imperils the chances of successful democratization.
- Third, since the disease has been concentrated thus far among teens and those in their 20s and the educated/professional classes, their deaths will impinge upon the development of a vibrant civil society, which cannot only agitate for democratization, but also keep the government in check.

While these three have all occurred on their own throughout history, it's the unique confluence of all three that makes the threat so dangerous. The five countries I'm focusing on essentially face losing an entire generation. No state could afford such a loss, and this is even true of states in the precarious position of trying to maintain nascent, fragile democratic practices.

*Do you have statistics to support your findings?*

Yes, and the data is staggering. In these five countries, 6.85 million adults, 21 percent of the population, are HIV-positive. The majority of those infected are between ages 15 and 30. Overall, infection rates are higher among the professional classes than the population in general. Teachers, for instance, are dying of AIDS at a rate twice that of the general population. Health care workers are experiencing similar infection rates. In essence, a large portion of the very people we'd expect to help democratize and stabilize a country will be dead in ten years. Already it's estimated that, in 1992, Zambia had already lost 10 years of development, while Zimbabwe had lost five. Effects on the gross domestic product growth rate demonstrate that these five countries will have growth rates of up to 20 percent lower than they could have had without HIV.

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*Has the correlation between democracy and health in Africa been linked in the past?*

Surprisingly little attention has been paid to this correlation. I think researchers and NGOs are starting to explore the intersection of the two a bit more, but the area is still fairly wide open. As the AIDS pandemic continues, though, it will become increasingly difficult to ignore the connections between the two.

*Does your study make any recommendations to reduce the threat that HIV/AIDS poses to the democratic process in Africa?*

The overriding recommendation that comes from this research is that any serious democratization program must take account of HIV/AIDS if it is to have a chance at succeeding. If a large portion of your population is dying, your investment in democratization is lost. I

don't make specific recommendations per se, because I think this research demonstrates that there is no one solution to this problem. Governments and the NGOs working inside the country need to develop appropriate measures, but they can learn from the experiences of others.

*For more information on the Manatt Fellowship Program, contact Dorin Tudoran, Director of IFES' Research and Communications at [dtudoran@ifes.org](mailto:dtudoran@ifes.org).*

