

Fertility Desires and the Prospects for Fertility Decline in Africa

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Premises

- Fertility decline is conditional on small family-size desires, i.e. low fertility demand
- Investments in family planning services will yield substantial returns only in the presence of demand to limit fertility
- Low fertility in Africa will not occur without the adoption of deliberate “family limitation” behaviors, i.e. limiting fertility to a few births per woman
- Conversion of small family-size desires into birth control is conditional on the costs of birth control being acceptably low

Objectives of this Research

Assess demand for birth control in Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Analyze recent data on the desire to limit childbearing
- Consider evidence of emerging interest in restricting fertility

Data

National demographic surveys (DHS and WFS) conducted from late 1970s to present:

50 surveys in total

27 DHS from 2000 to present

23 DHS from 2000 to present that can be paired with earlier survey (WFS or DHS)

I rely on the attitudinal item that has been shown to have highest *reliability* and *validity* among standard set of survey items:

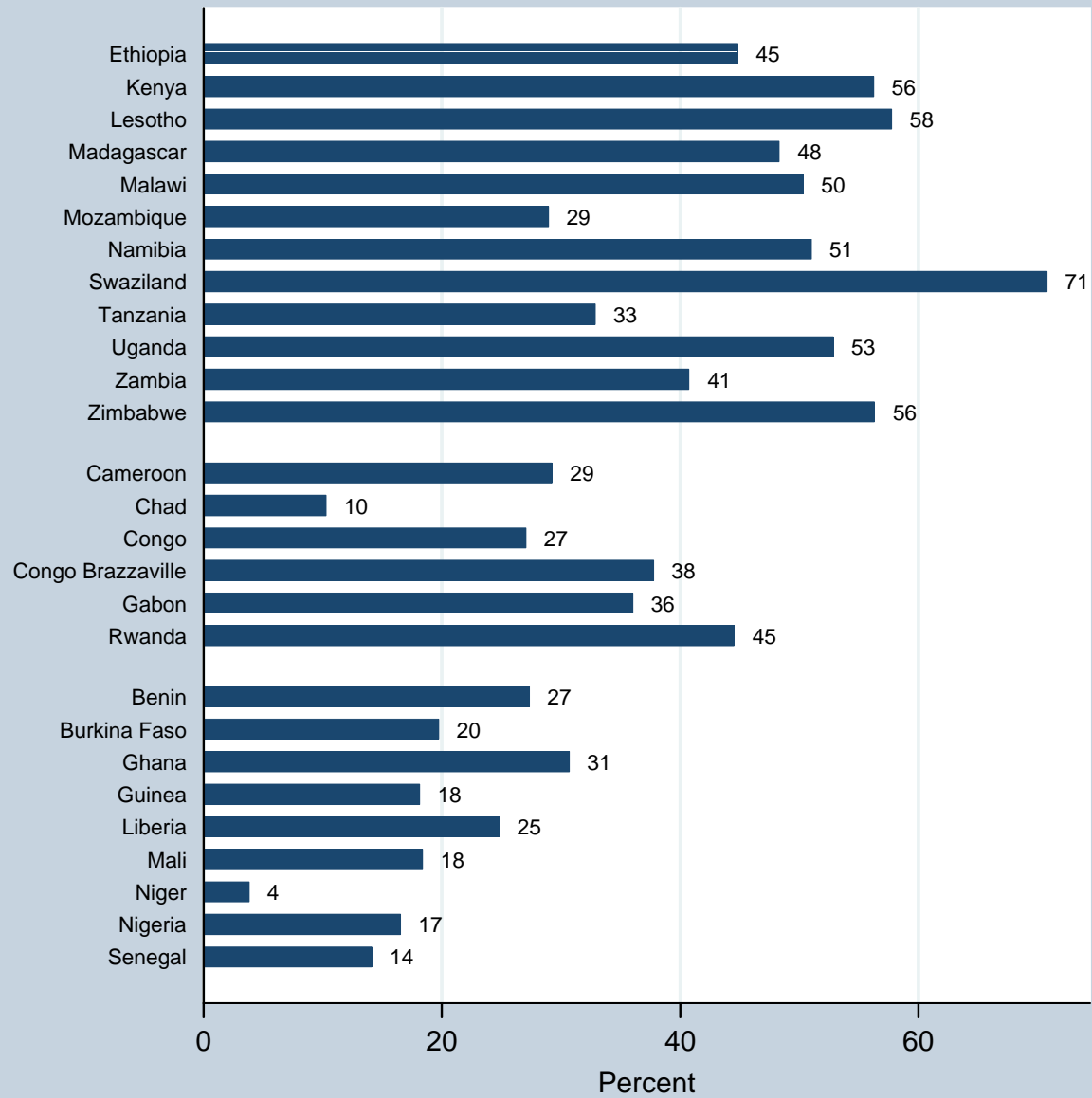
“Would you like to have (a/another) child, or would you prefer not to have any (more) children?”

Desires to limit childbearing: current levels

I examine the expressed desire to have no more children at key points in the reproductive career:

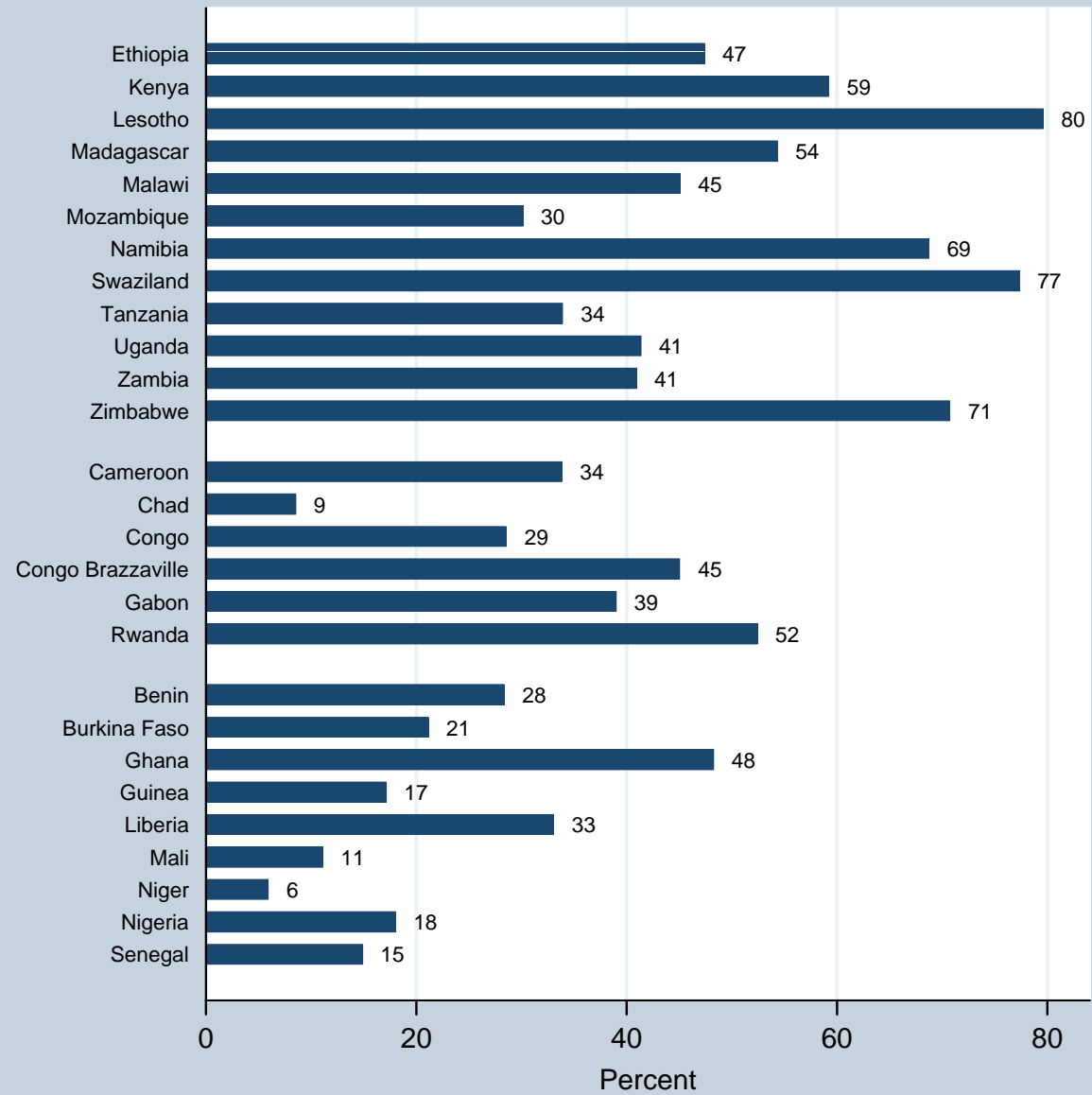
- ages 30 - 34
- parity 4
- parity 2

Figure 1: Percent Wanting No More Children: Age 30-34



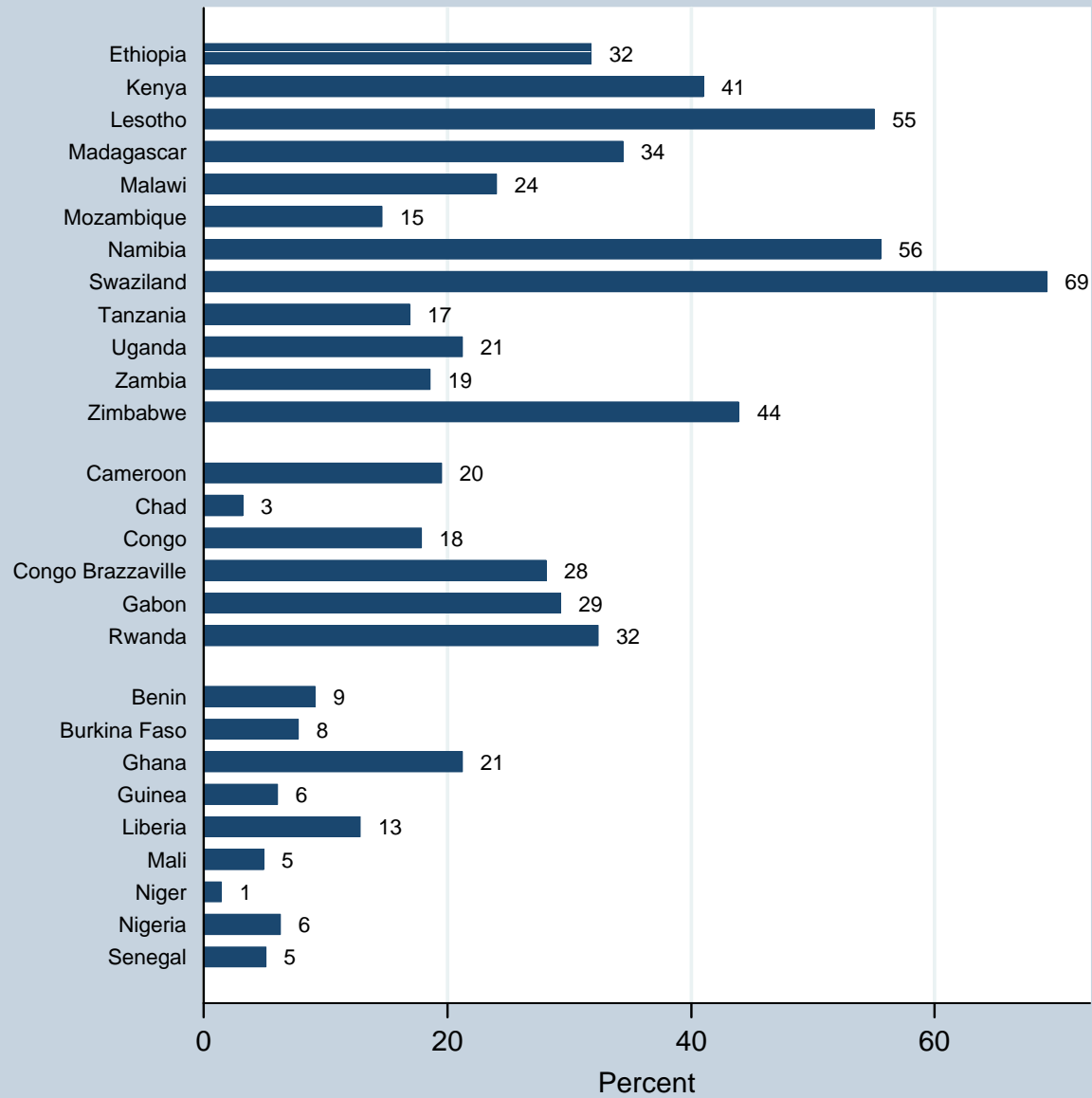
Most recent survey since 2000

Figure 2: Percent Wanting No More Children: Parity 4



Most recent survey since 2000

Figure 3: Percent Wanting No More Children: Parity 2



Most recent survey since 2000

Conclusions: desires to limit fertility

Even at parity = 4, only in a minority of countries (mainly in Eastern and Southern Africa) do more than one-half of women wish to stop childbearing

In Middle and West Africa, generally less than one-third want to stop at parity = 4

====> Desire to limit childbearing to a small or moderate number of children is largely absent

Unwanted fertility: current levels

Incidence of unwanted births -- an indicator of unsatisfied desire for greater birth control

Unwanted fertility arguably offers the most direct opportunity for family planning programs to impact fertility

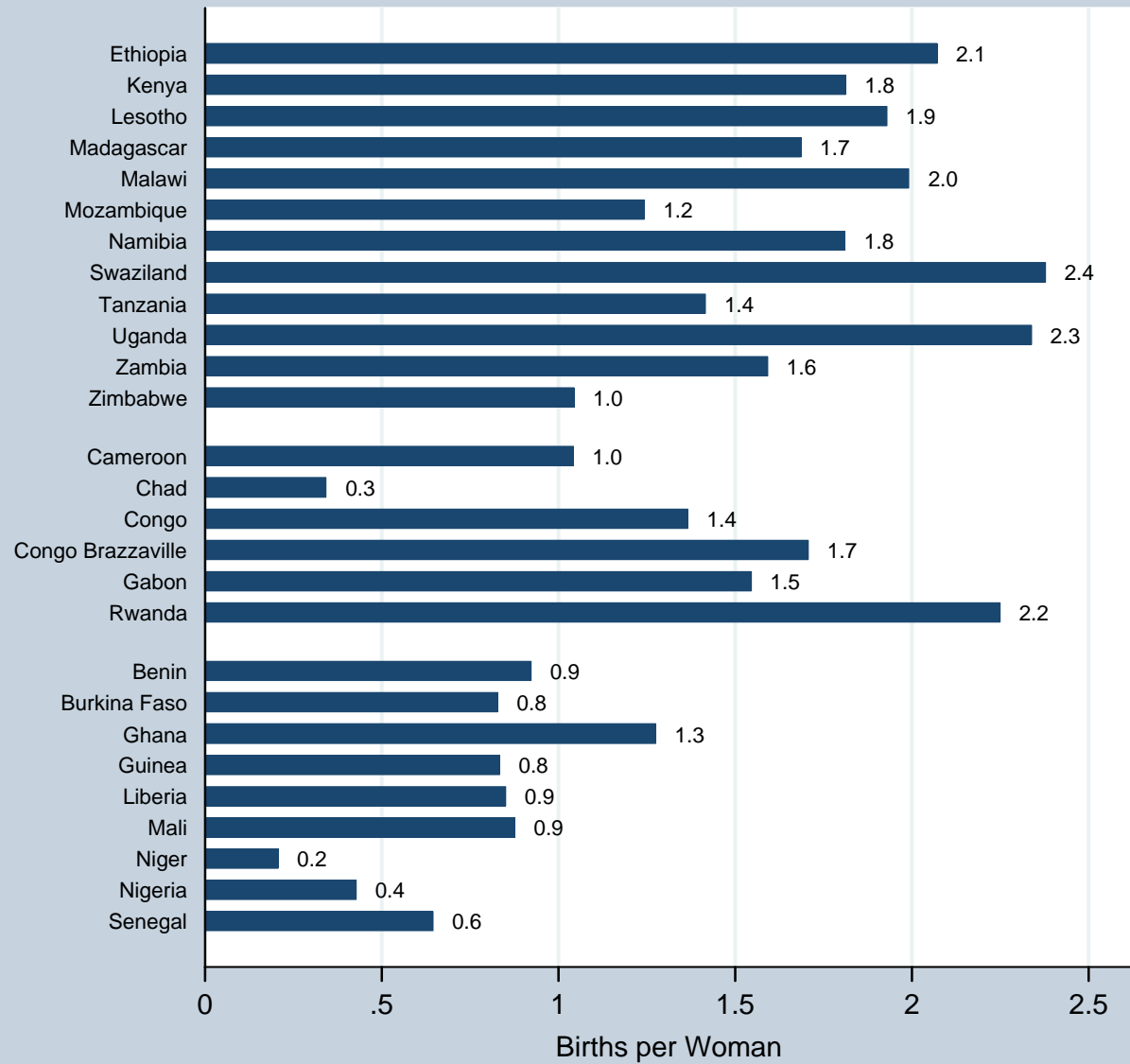
I estimate percentage of births unwanted using the method of Casterline and el-Zeini (2007)

From this, the “unwanted TFR” can be calculated, and also its complement the “wanted TFR”

Denominator for both TFRs = all women

Numerator = births of specific type (wanted or unwanted)

Figure 4: Unwanted Total Fertility Rate



Most recent survey since 2000

Aggregate Prospective estimates, 36 months before survey

Conclusions: unwanted fertility

Unwanted fertility is relatively high in Africa:

- Roughly one birth per woman or higher in most countries (exceptions are three West African countries and Chad)
- In some Eastern and Southern countries, unwanted TFR approaches (or exceeds) two births per woman
- And, unwanted fertility is on the rise in most countries (evidence available from author)

====> An opportunity for fertility impact of improved
family
planning services

Reducing unwanted fertility: fertility impact

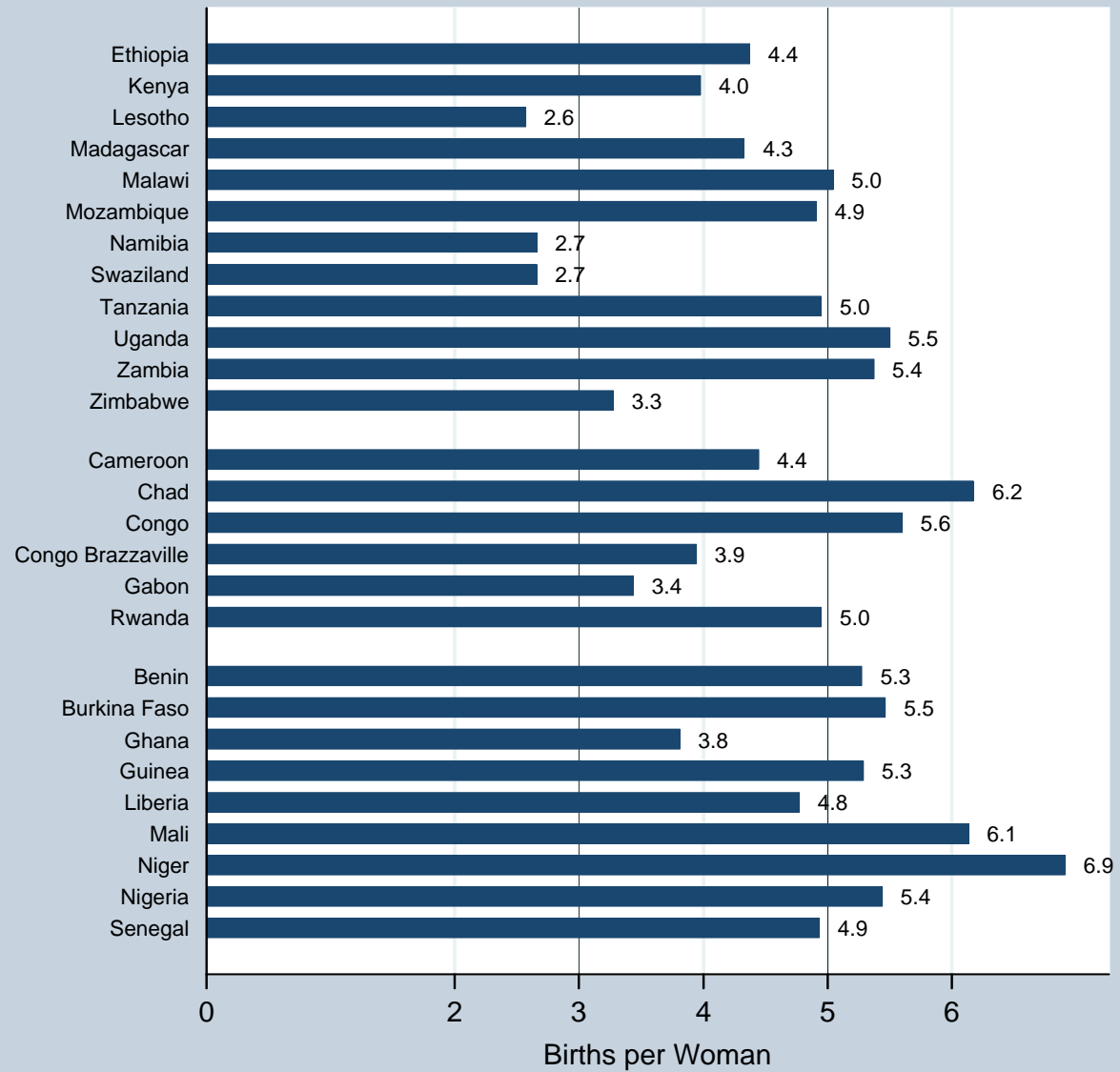
But what level of fertility would result from reducing unwanted fertility?

To assess the possible impact, I carry out "simulations": I calculate TFR that would result from reductions in unwanted TFR, under two scenarios:

- i. 50% reduction in unwanted TFR
- ii. Unwanted TFR set to 0.50 births per woman

note: wanted TFR retained at present level

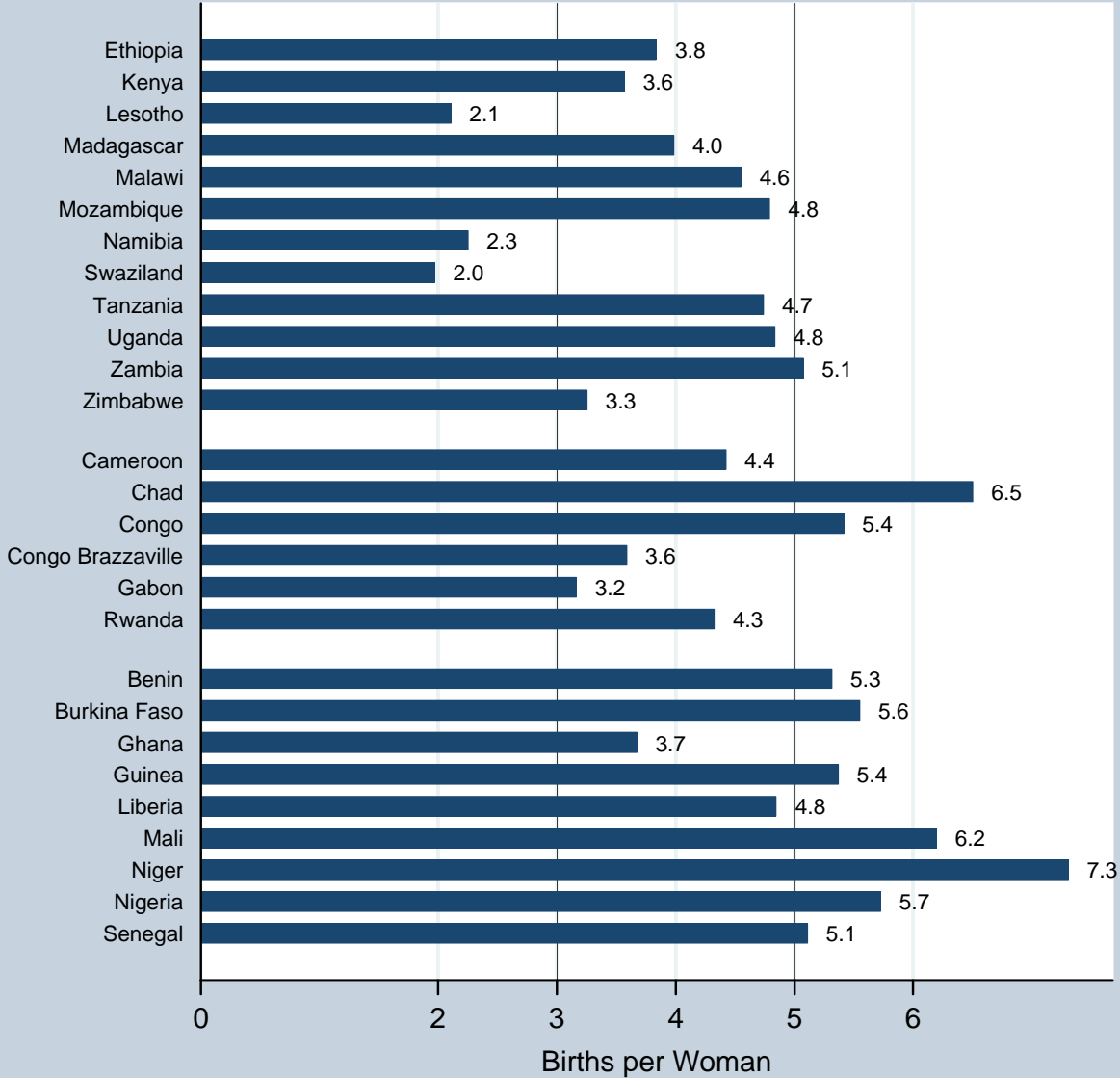
Figure 5: TFR with 50% Reduction in Unwanted TFR



Most recent survey since 2000

Aggregate Prospective estimates, 36 months before survey

Figure 6: TFR with Unwanted TFR = 0.50



Most recent survey since 2000
 Aggregate Prospective estimates, 36 months before survey

Summary of simulations:

Reduce unwanted TFR by 50%

====> TFR > 4.0 births per woman in 20 out of 27 countries

Unwanted TFR set to 0.50 births per woman

====> TFR > 4.0 births per woman in 18 out of 27 countries

8/9 West African countries have TFR > 4.0 (except Ghana)

7/9 West African countries have TFR > 5.0

Conclusions: reducing unwanted fertility

In most of Africa, considerable success in reducing unwanted fertility will leave fertility at moderate to high levels (TFR > 4.0 births per woman)

Especially in West Africa

In only a few countries – Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland – would success in reducing unwanted fertility result in TFR < 3.0 births per woman

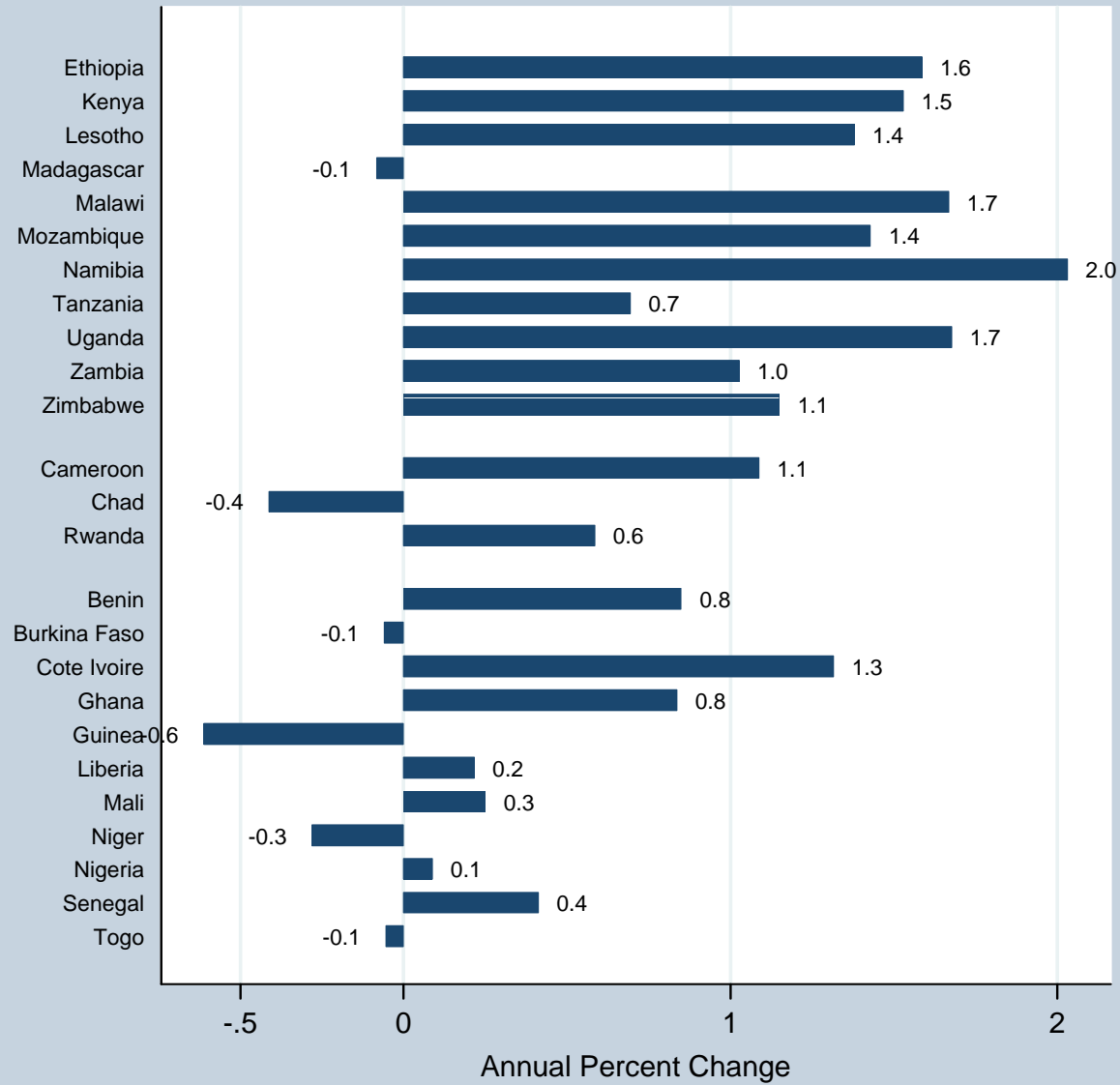
Indications of changing desires

Fertility desires at present do not, in general, support low (or even moderate) levels of fertility in most African countries

But there are important signs of change

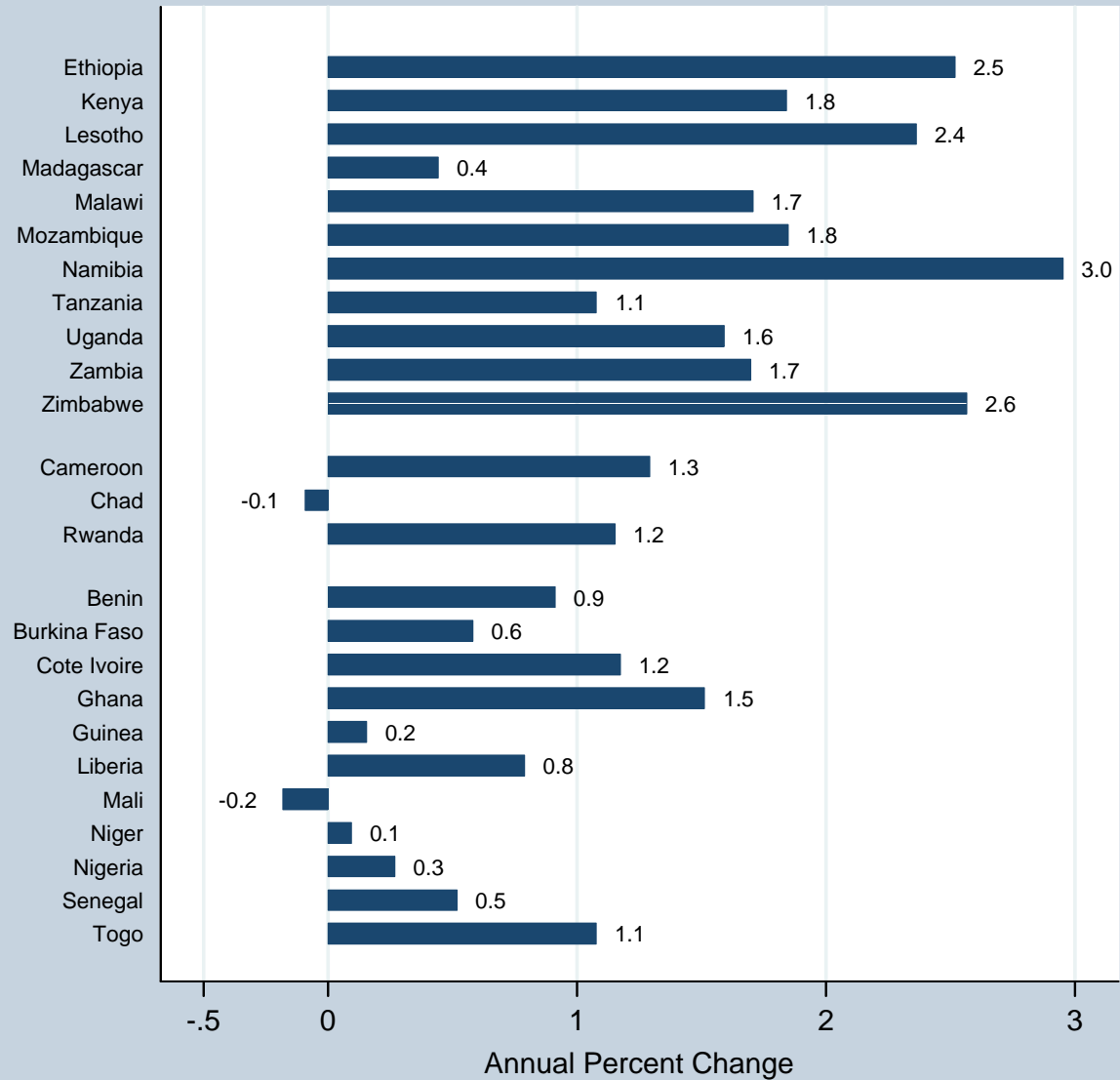
1. Trends in the desire to stop childbearing

Figure 7: Change in % Want No More: Age 30-34
Percent Change per Annum



Most recent survey since 2000 and earliest survey

Figure 8: Change in % Want No More: Parity 4
Percent Change Per Annum



Most recent survey since 2000 and earliest survey

Summary of change in desires:

In most African countries -- especially in East and Southern Africa -- desire to stop childbearing is increasing, and at a rapid rate (1-2 percentage points per annum)

Suggests rapid emergence of consciousness about family limitation

Were this trend to continue, within a decade or so a majority of women in most African countries will prefer to limit their childbearing to a small number of children (< 4)

Indications of changing desires (cont.)

2. Trends among younger women in unwanted fertility

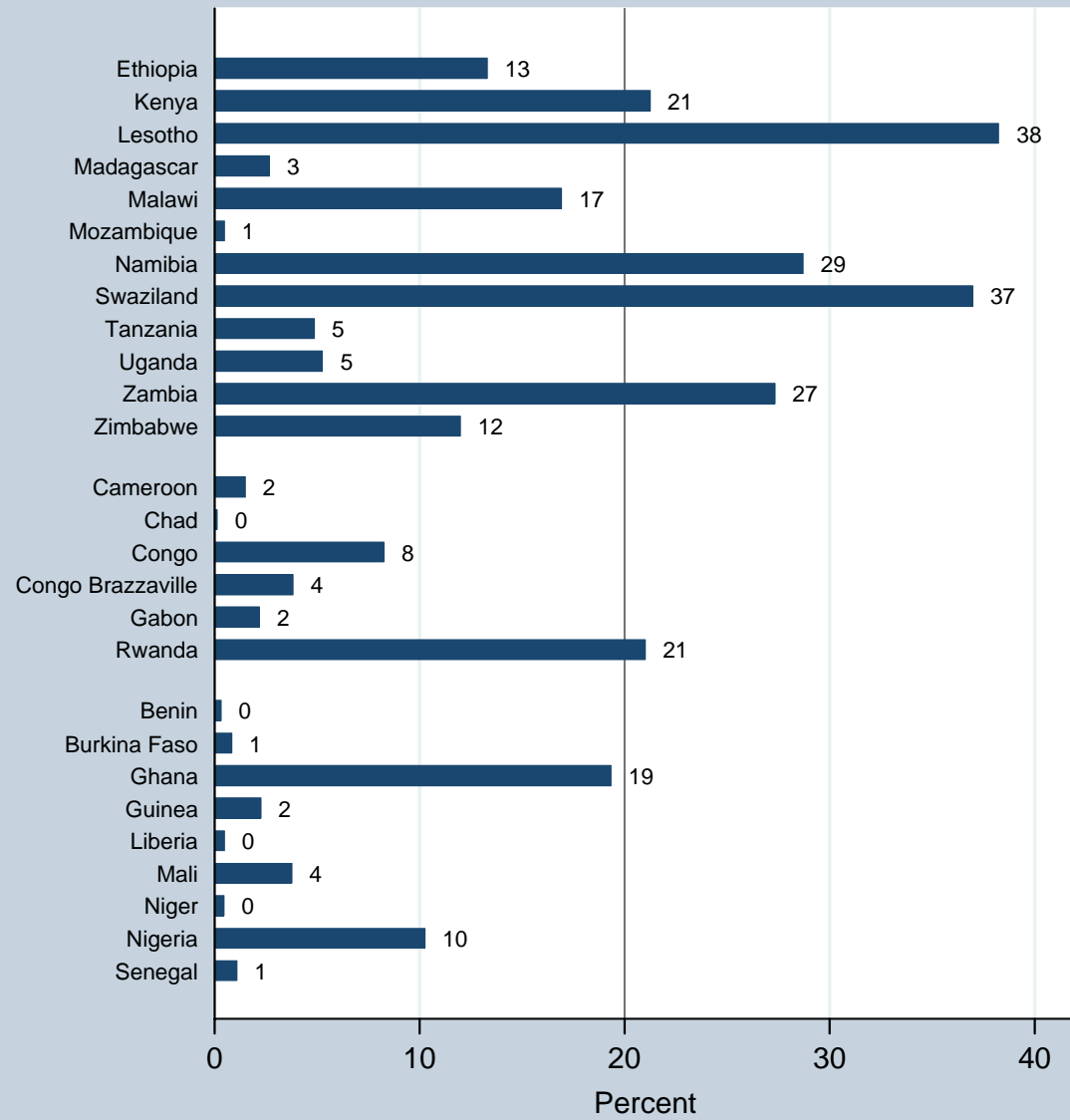
Recent DHS surveys provide evidence that a substantial minority of younger women are not keen on early childbearing

This is a phenomenon that, to my knowledge, has gone unnoticed

Responses to survey item, asked child-by-child:

“At the time you became pregnant with <name>, did you want to become pregnant then, did you want to wait until later, or did not want (more) children at all?”

Figure 9: Percent First Births Unwanted



Most recent survey since 2000
 Births during 5 years before survey

Young women and childbearing:

These are extraordinary figures for any region:

In 11/27 countries, >10% of 1st births declared unwanted

Especially remarkable in Africa, given emphasis on young women demonstrating fecundity

And this is an increasing trend -- emergence since 1990s

Intriguing signs of a nascent anti-natalism among young African women -- could constitute historic break from prevailing attitudes in past generations

Caution: meaning of these DHS results not yet fully understood

Conclusions

- Desire for many children remains a fundamental feature of African fertility regimes
- Unwanted fertility is relatively high (averaging one birth per woman or higher) -- there is an opportunity for enhanced family planning services to have noticeable fertility impact
- But reducing unwanted fertility alone will leave most of Africa with moderate to high levels of fertility -- TFR > 4.0
- Sharp trends towards a desire for smaller families are evident
 - Might there be even more recent impact of food + fuel crisis, and now the worldwide recession?
- Striking evidence that younger cohorts are adopting anti-natalist mentalities – possibly an historic break from the past