Demography and Conflict: 
How Population Pressure and Youth Bulges Affect the Risk of Civil War

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Demography and conflict

- Optimists vs pessimists
- Historically:
  - Long-term: prosperity
  - Temporary: population-induced breakdowns
- Population and conflict in modern times:
  - Local and small-scale conflict
  - Conflict may lead to cooperation
  - Mediated by state capacity, responses
Defining internal armed conflict

- Incompatibility over government/territory
- Armed force
- At least two organized parties
- One is the government of a state
- Minimum 25 battle-related deaths per year

Uppsala/PRIO conflict data (Gleditsch et al., 2002)
Armed conflict 1946-2005

Source: Gleditsch et al., 2002
The location of armed conflict, 2005

Population pressure

Three schools
– Resource scarcity
– Technological optimism
– Political ecology
The resource scarcity model

Population pressure, resource depletion, distribution

Resource scarcity

Economic stagnation, migration

Resource competition

Armed conflict
# Demographic pressure

Population pressure and the onset of internal armed conflict 1950–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Basic Model</th>
<th>Expanded Model</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>Post-Cold War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>Lower risk (weak)</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth * density</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Higher risk (medium)</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban growth</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Lower risk (medium)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If overall pressures don’t matter, then what?

- Decomposing demography
  - Age composition: youth bulges

- Disaggregating the level of analysis
  - Geographical and political units
A clash of generations?

‘I don’t think Islam is any more violent than any other religions […]. But the key factor is the demographic factor. The [Muslim] bulge will fade.’
Samuel P. Huntington, October 2001

‘The Arab World has a problem with its Attas in more than one sense. Globalization has caught it at a bad demographic moment.’
Fareed Zakaria, October 2001
Youth bulges

• Large youth cohorts
  – Low opportunity cost
  – Unemployment
  – Relative cohort size
  – Economic growth
  – Education
  – Regime
  – Urbanization

• A demographic dividend?
Youth bulges and political violence

• Global model
• Political violence:
  - Armed conflict
  - Terrorism
  - Riots
• Contextual factors
## Youth bulges

### Age composition and political violence 1950–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armed conflict onset</th>
<th>Terrorism</th>
<th>Riots and violent demonstrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth bulges</strong></td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YB * Economic growth</strong></td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YB * Dependency ratio</strong></td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YB * Regime type</strong></td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YB * Tertiary education growth</strong></td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional youth population trends

Figure 1.5  Trends in the developing world’s population of young people vary significantly across regions

Demographic window

Korea, South: 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Window yet to open

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Iran: opening the window

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Demography and violence in India

• State-level analysis
• Time-period 1956-2002
• Measures of violence:
  - Armed conflict
  - Violent political events
  - Hindu-Muslim riots
• Broad set of variables
Demography and violence in India

Population pressure and political violence 1956–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor (and Interactions)</th>
<th>Armed conflict</th>
<th>Violent political events</th>
<th>Riots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural population growth * density</td>
<td>Higher risk (moderate, density)</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban growth</td>
<td>Lower risk</td>
<td>Lower risk (weak)</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural density * low agricultural yield</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low agricultural wage growth</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Higher risk (only short-term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural density * rural inequality</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth bulges</td>
<td>Higher risk (esp. male surplus)</td>
<td>Higher risk</td>
<td>Higher risk (when urban inequality)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions and recommendations

• Population-induced resource scarcity does not seem to increase the risk of armed conflict across countries

• Local effects of population pressure on violence point to the importance of internal distribution and the preventive capacity as well as adaptability of central and local governments and individuals, rather than absolute scarcity
Conclusions and recommendations

• Efforts to minimize conflict may include:
  – Measures to enhance local resource management capacity
  – Targeted programs aimed at curbing population pressure, but need to be adapted to local contexts
  – Programs aimed at providing alternative opportunities for young people in rural areas, particularly when agricultural production and wages are declining
Conclusions and recommendations

- Large youth cohorts in developing countries with low opportunity cost are associated with higher risks of political violence.
- As fertility declines, a demographic window of opportunity opens that could also represent a peace dividend.
- Low-intensity conflict may be a relatively inexpensive way of signaling political demands, hence the significance of factors that make such conflict marginally less costly.
Conclusions and recommendations

• Efforts to minimize conflict may include:
  – Measures to engage youth in development: education, microfinance, government programs, labor market flexibility
  – Pay attention to the role of migration
  – Greater attention paid to the needs and opportunities of young men
  – Monitoring the employment situation of educated youth
Conclusions and recommendations

• More research needed:
  – Youth bulges and political stability
  – Age composition and exclusion in urban centers
  – The role of education
  – Conditions facilitating a demographic bonus
  – Micro-level studies of rebel recruitment
  – Youth bulges in post-conflict settings
  – What youth programs work?