

# Demography and Conflict:

## How Population Pressure and Youth Bulges Affect the Risk of Civil War

Henrik Urdal

Centre for the Study of Civil War (PRIO)

Presentation at the Environmental Change and Security Program,  
The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
Washington D.C., 5 March 2007

# Demography and conflict

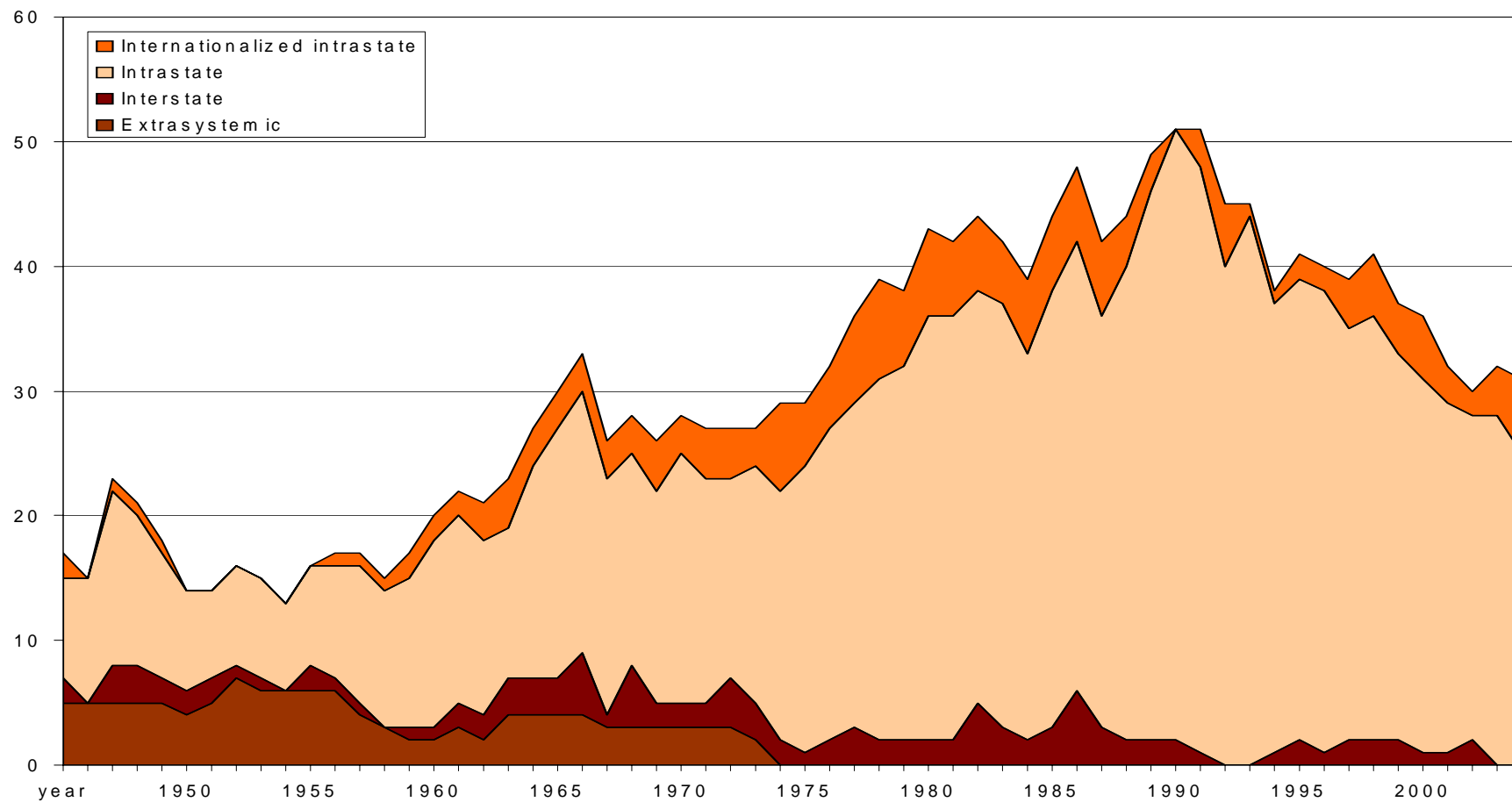
- Optimists vs pessimists
- Historically:
  - Long-term: prosperity
  - Temporary: population-induced breakdowns
- Population and conflict in modern times:
  - Local and small-scale conflict
  - Conflict may lead to cooperation
  - Mediated by state capacity, responses

## 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

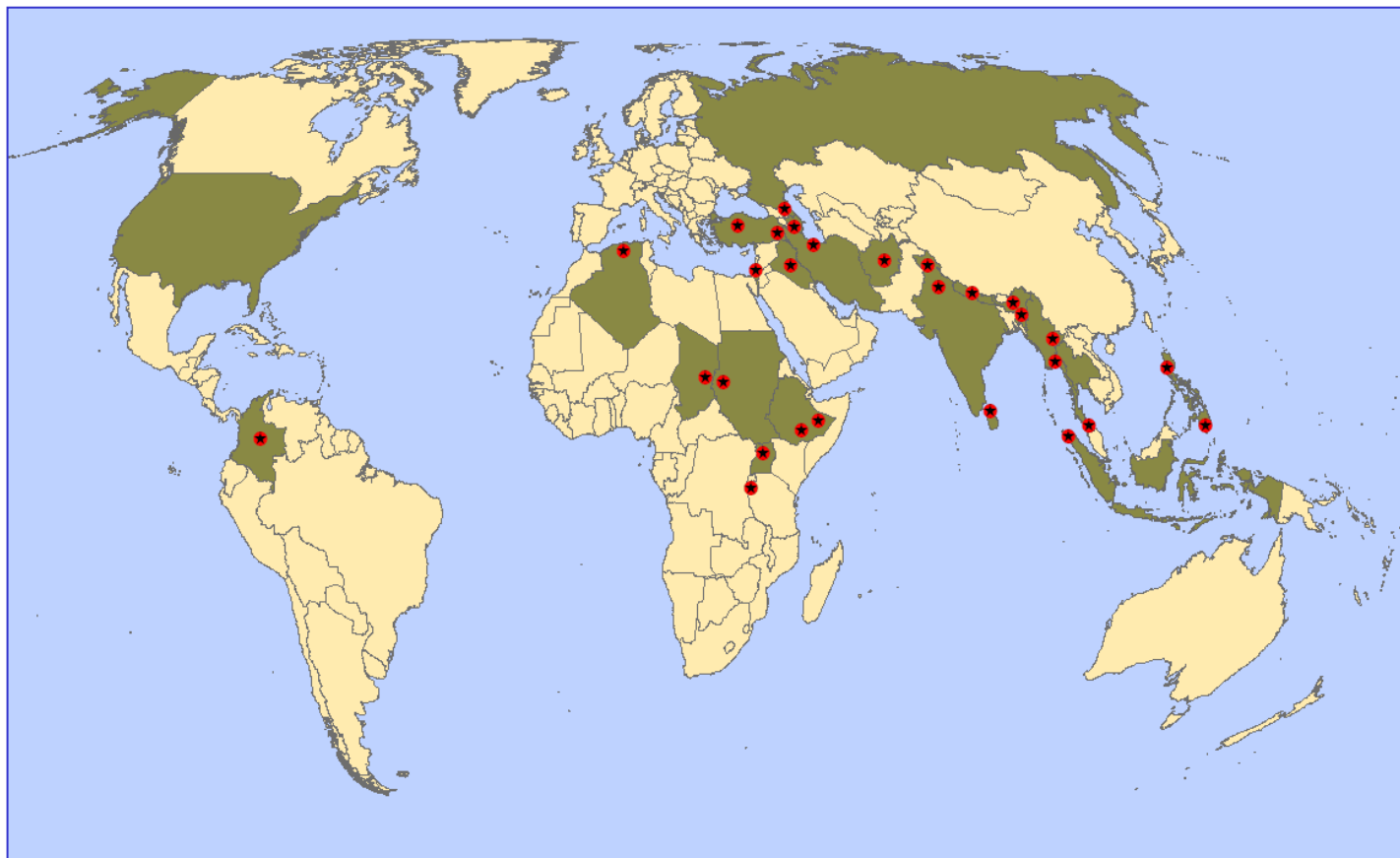
Uppsala/PRIO conflict data (Gleditsch et al., 2002)

# Armed conflict 1946-2005



Source: Gleditsch et al., 2002

# The location of armed conflict, 2005



Source: Harbom, Högbladh & Wallersteen, 2006. Map produced by Halvard Buhaug.

# 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

	Basic Model	Expanded Model	1970s	Post-Cold War
<b>Population growth</b>	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
<b>Population density</b>	Lower risk (weak)	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
<b>Growth * density</b>	Not significant	Not significant	Higher risk (medium)	Not significant
<b>Urban growth</b>		Not significant		Lower risk (medium)

Based on Urdal, Henrik, 2005. 'People vs Malthus: Population Pressure, Environmental Degradation and Armed Conflict Revisited', *Journal of Peace Research* 42(4): 417–434.



## 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

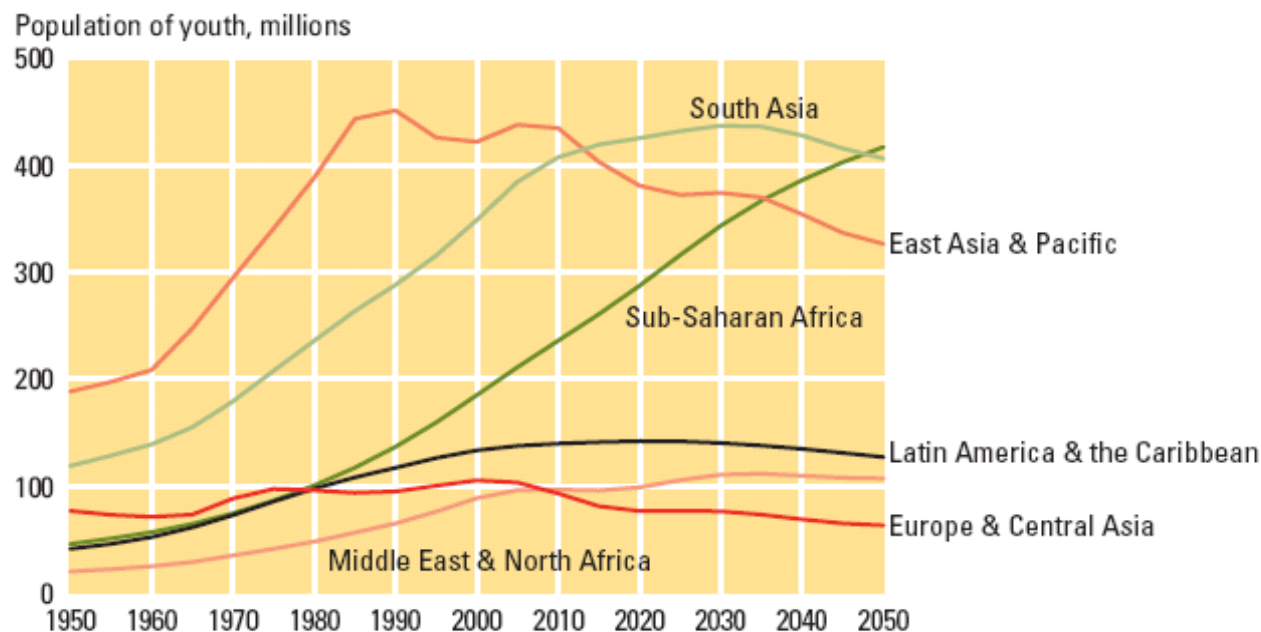
Age composition and political violence 1950–2000

	<b>Armed conflict onset</b>	<b>Terrorism</b>	<b>Riots and violent demonstrations</b>
<b>Youth bulges</b>	Higher risk	Higher risk	Higher risk
<b>YB * Economic growth</b>	Not significant	Higher risk	Not significant
<b>YB * Dependency ratio</b>	Not significant	Not significant	Higher risk
<b>YB * Regime type</b>	Higher risk	Not significant	Not significant
<b>YB * Tertiary education growth</b>	Not significant	Higher risk	Not significant

Based on Urdal, Henrik 2006. 'A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence', *International Studies Quarterly* 50(3): pp–pp.

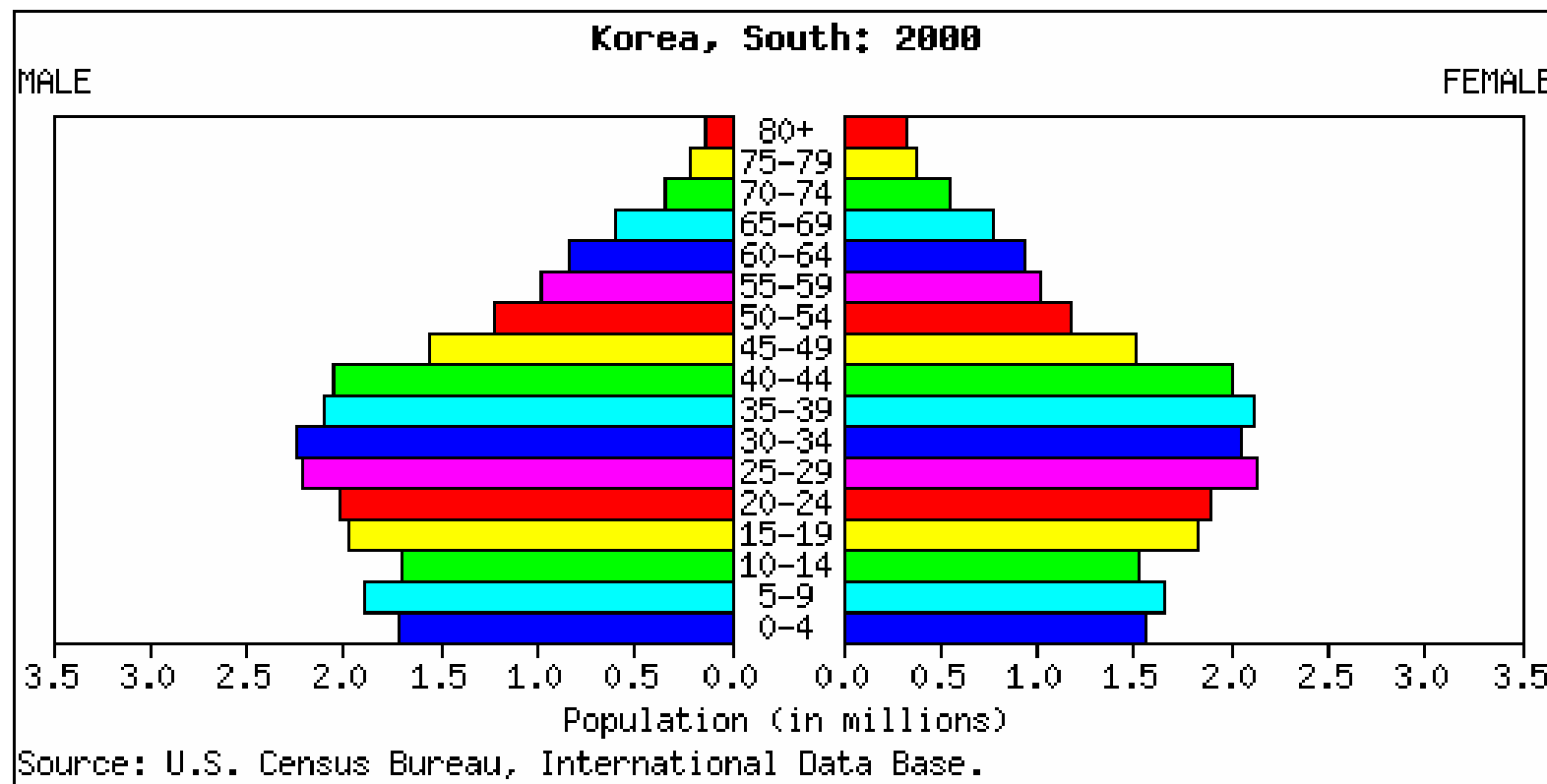
# Regional youth population trends

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

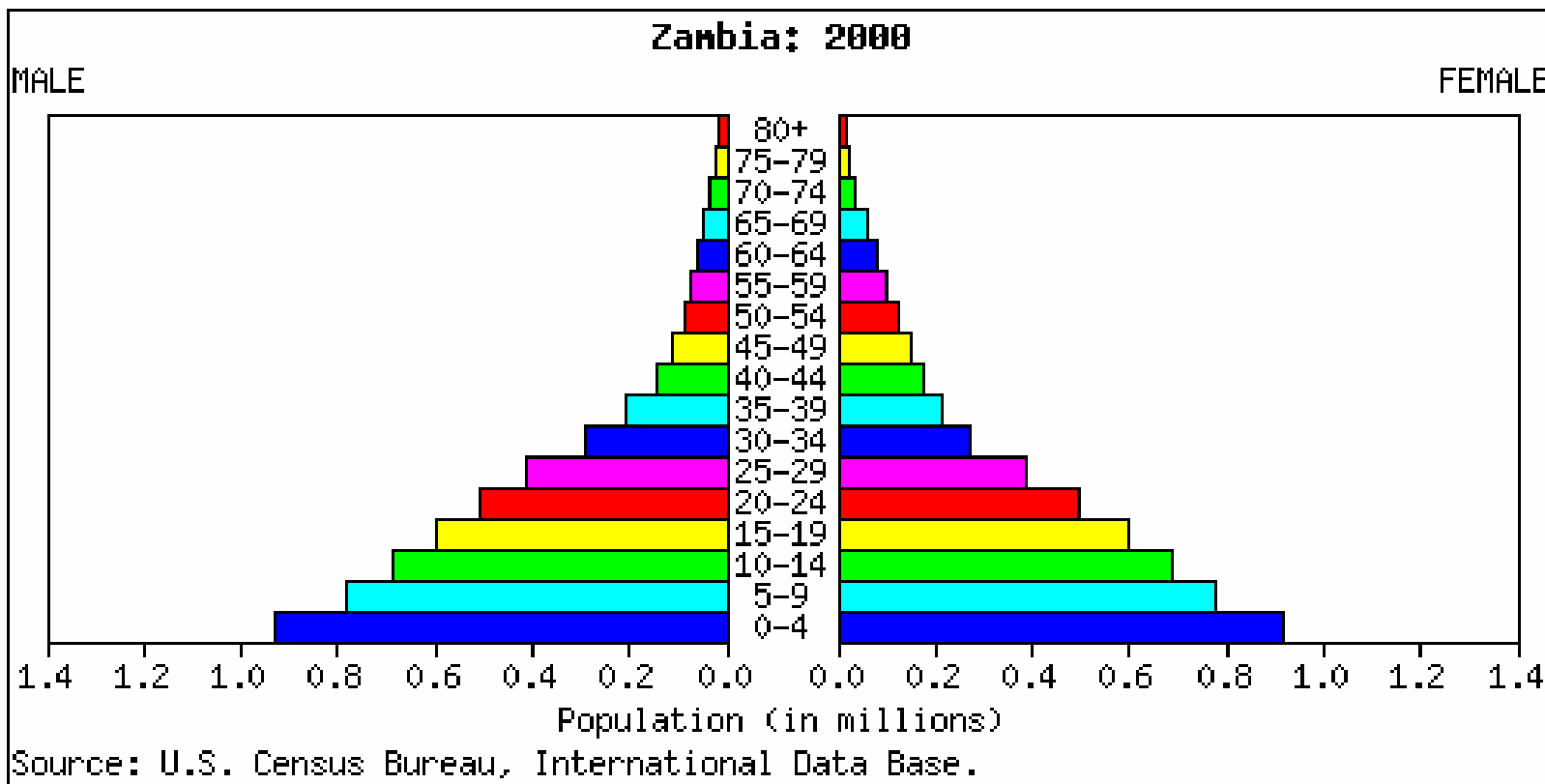


Source: United Nations (2005b), medium variant.

# Demographic window

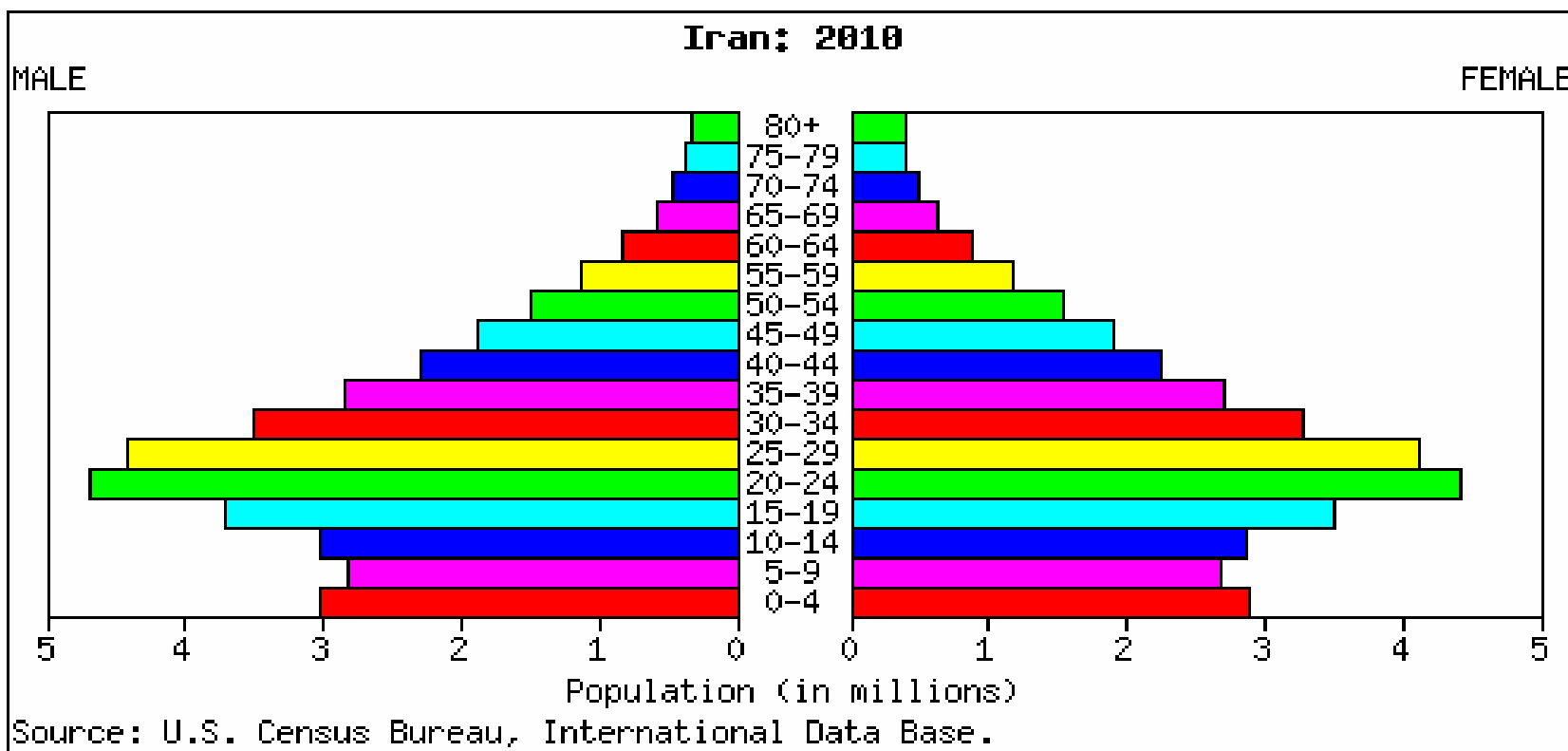


# Window yet to open





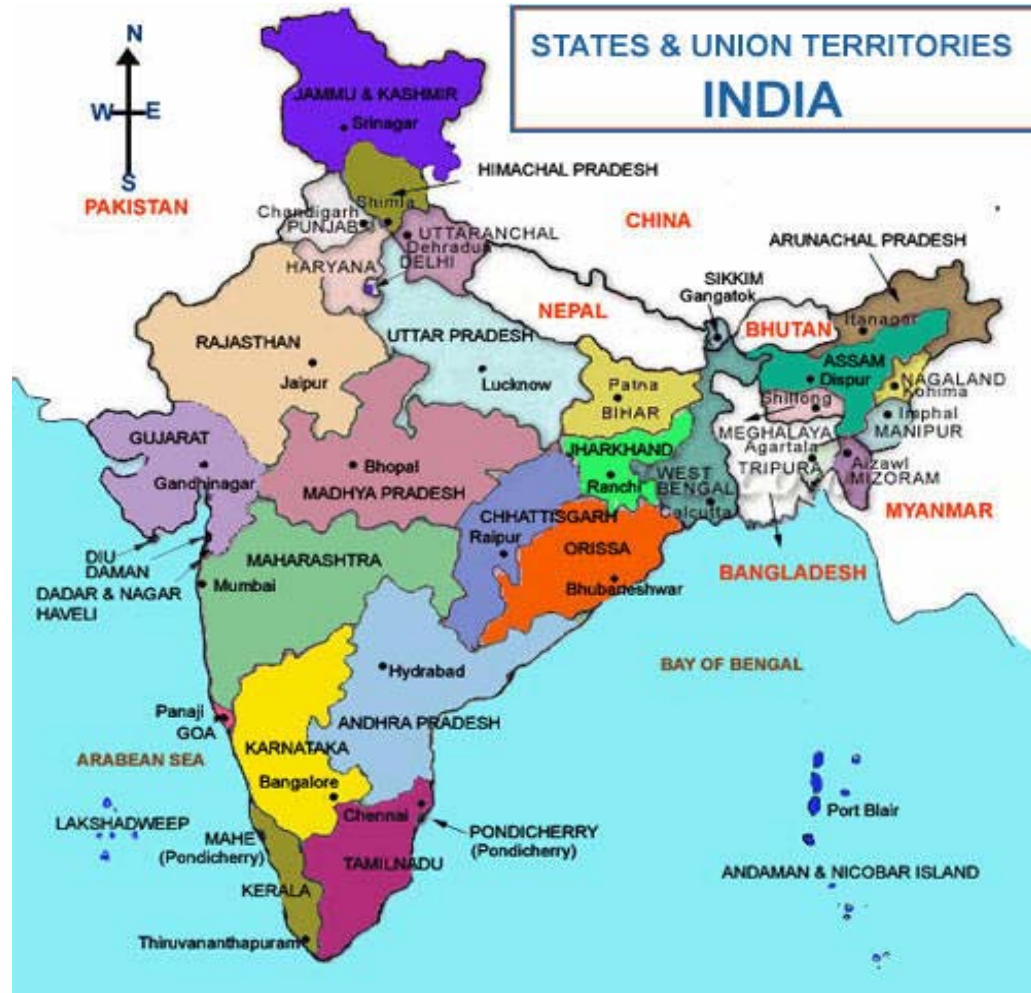
# Iran: opening the window



# 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

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

Henrik Urdal, 2006. 'Population, Resources and Political Violence: A Sub-National Study of India', mimeo, The International Peace Research Institute, Oslo.

## 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?