

Population Age Structure and Its Relation to Civil Conflict: A Graphic Metric

Recent studies suggest that a large “youth bulge”—a youthful population age structure—can increase the risk of the onset of civil conflict and political violence (Urdal, 2006, Cincotta et al., 2003). These studies exclude states with a recent history of civil conflict, reasoning that they are already highly vulnerable to persistent and re-emerging violence (Collier et al., 2002). Can these two quantifiable variables—population age structure and recent history of civil unrest—be used to project risks of civil conflict a decade into the future?

We conducted separate analyses of three decades—the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s—using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, which identifies conflicts with at least 25 battle-related deaths per year (Gleditsch et al., 2002; UCDP/PRIO, 2006) and age-structural data from the UN Population Division (2005). Countries with average immigration or emigration rates exceeding 0.5 percent between 1970 and 2000 were removed, as were the five most populous countries (China, India, Indonesia, USSR/Russia, and the United States) and countries with populations less than 100,000.

Findings

- Of all countries that experienced civil conflict during the last five years of the prior decade, 76 percent experienced civil conflict for at least one year during the following decade. **Conclusion: Three-fourths of all countries with recent conflict will likely**

experience conflict in the next decade.

- Of countries without recent civil conflict, 24 percent of all states with more than 60 percent of their population under 30 years of age (i.e., a young age structure) experienced at least one incident of civil conflict during the following decade. Among countries with less than 60 percent under 30 years of age, just 7 percent experienced civil conflict. **Conclusion: One-fourth of all non-conflict countries with young age structures will likely experience a new civil conflict during the next decade.**
- About 86 percent of all countries that experienced a *new* outbreak of civil conflict had age structures with 60 percent or more of the population younger than 30 years of age. Although country age structures in many regions matured between 1970 and 1999, this “outbreak benchmark” remained virtually constant. **Conclusion: This “60-percent-under-30” benchmark could serve as a means to identify and track a state’s demographic risks of civil conflict** (see figures below).

Policy Implications

If these relationships accurately reflect some of the risk factors of civil conflict, future risks could be reduced by (a) supporting sustained efforts to mediate incipient civil conflicts; and (b) by supporting programs and policies that promote advancement along the path of the demographic transition in countries with young age structures.

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Figure 1: Path of the Demographic Transition, 1970 and 2050

Each point represents a country's position, plotted in terms of the most mature (aged 60+ years) and least mature (aged 0 to 29 years) segments of the population. The demographic transition function $(y = -20.47\ln(x) + 102.59)$ plots the average path of expected maturation of population age structures during the course of the demographic transition—the change from high birth/high death rates to low birth/low death rates.

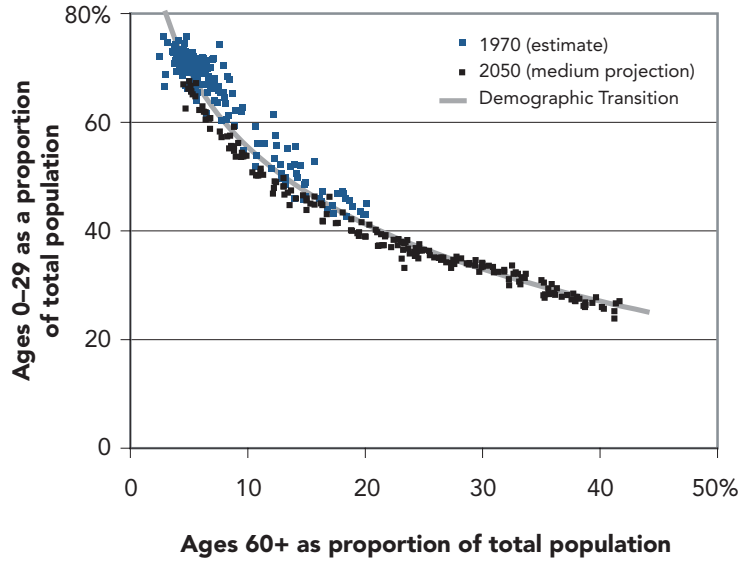


Figure 2: Distribution of Outbreaks of Civil Conflict, 1970-1999

The distribution of outbreaks of civil conflict (in countries without recent conflict) along the path of the demographic transition during three decades of analysis: 1970-79, 1980-89, 1990-99. Note the clustering of outbreaks in the region of youthful age structures.

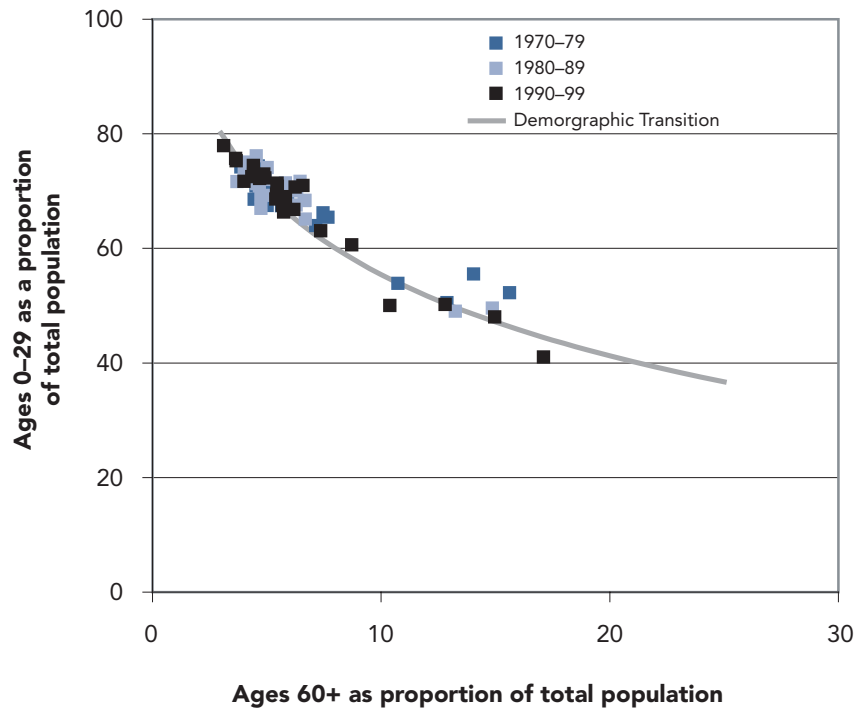
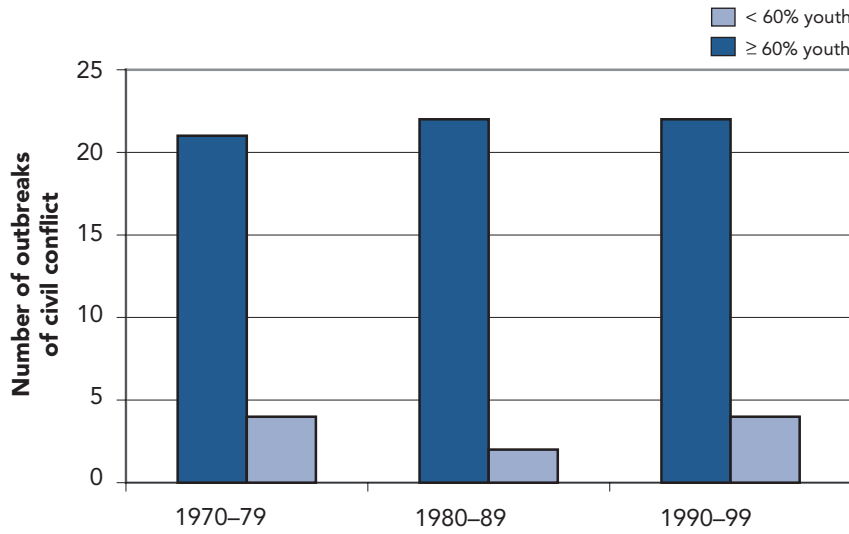
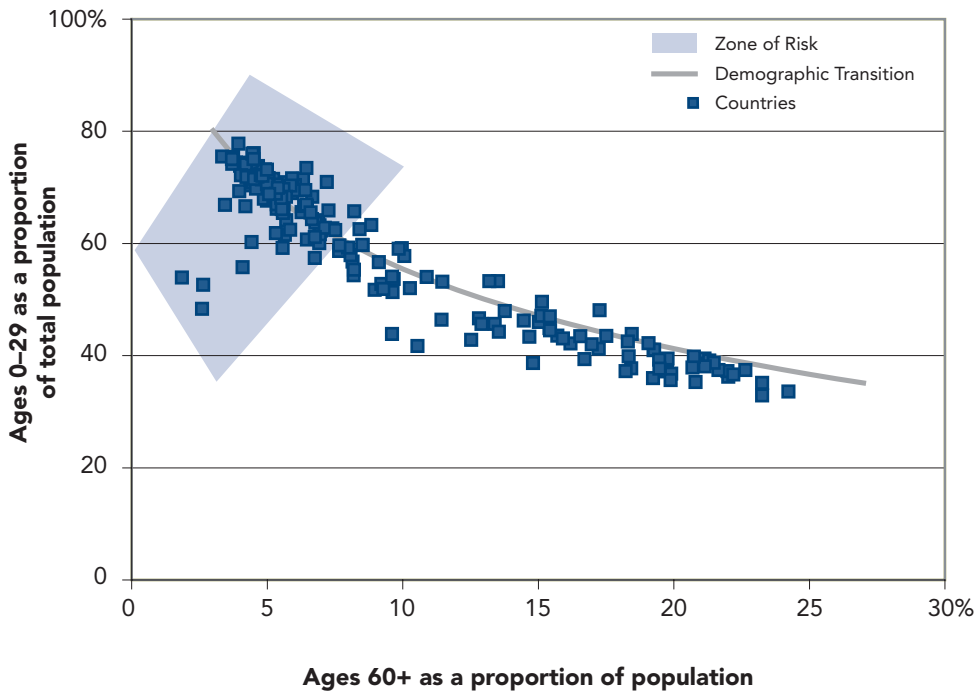


Figure 3: Number of Outbreaks of Civil Conflict by Age Structure, 1970-1999



The ratio between the number of countries that experienced outbreaks of civil conflict on the younger side of the outbreak benchmark—where 60 percent of the population is under age 30—ranged from 11:1 (1980-89) to 5.25:1 (1970-79).

Figure 4: Countries With Age-Structural Risks, 2005



The zone of greatest concentration of outbreaks of civil conflict is shaded, and lies among age structures that are younger than the outbreak benchmark—where 60 percent of the adult population is below the age of 30 years. Country positions on this graph are for 2005 (according to data from the UN Population Division, 2005). The majority of states in this zone are in sub-Saharan Africa and western Asia.

Countries With Very Young and Youthful Age Structures, 2005

Swaziland	Angola	Ethiopia	Micronesia	Uzbekistan
Zimbabwe	Congo	Mozambique	Mauritania	Philippines
Uganda	United Republic of Tanzania	Solomon Islands	Gabon	Bangladesh
Rwanda	Haiti	Guinea-Bissau	Bhutan	Tonga
Zambia	Cape Verde	Timor-Leste	Oman	Gambia
Lesotho	Côte d'Ivoire	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Turkmenistan
Kenya	Senegal	Iran	Cambodia	Egypt
São Tomé and Príncipe	Nigeria	Palestinian Territories	Belize	Bolivia
Burundi	Arab Republic	Guatemala	Guinea	El Salvador
Mali	Syrian	Namibia	Sudan	Saudi Arabia
Yemen	Chad	Tajikistan	Libya	Dominican Republic
Burkina Faso	Togo	Somalia	Papua New Guinea	Morocco
Botswana	Central African Republic	Ghana	Jordan	South Africa
Eritrea	Nicaragua	Honduras	Vanuatu	Kyrgyzstan
Malawi	Cameroon	Madagascar	Nepal	Peru
Liberia	Comoros	Iraq	Sierra Leone	Samoa
Niger	Maldives	Djibouti	Algeria	Fiji
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Benin	Equatorial Guinea	Mongolia	
		Laos	Paraguay	

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