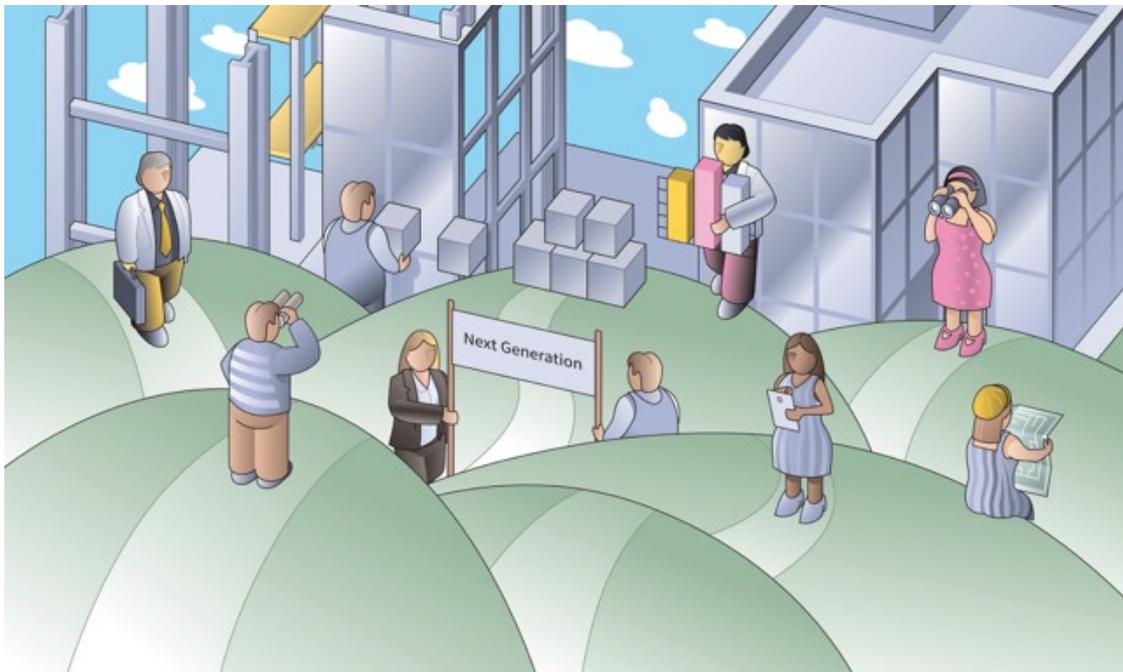


Views from Generation Y



Political Demography:

**In order to understand the world, one can start
by studying demography**

Author: Philippe Hachen

Political Demography: In order to understand the world, one can start by studying demography

Napoleon Bonaparte already understood, “If you know a country’s geography, you can understand and predict its foreign policy.” Consequently, certain scholars claim that to know a nation’s demography, is to better understand and predict its foreign policy. Indeed, sound knowledge of the dynamics of demography can provide quite powerful insights into geopolitics, national security and global development. Therefore, demography should definitely be taken seriously by strategic planners and policy makers.

Research on “political demography” embraces the relationship between political science and demography and subsequently demonstrates how powerful demographic variables are in shaping political processes on a global and national level (Kaufmann & Duffy Toft, 2012, p.4). This article uses Jack A. Goldstone’s publication *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (Goldstone et al., 2012) as a foundation and includes several real-life examples to further demonstrate this topic’s relevance.

Demographic variables are at the core of political dilemmas

The discussion surrounding how population affects political systems is not a new one. One of the most influential theories is Robert Malthus’ “Malthusian nightmare” (Goldstone, 2012, p.11). The economist wrote a popular and rather somber theory about the overall balance of the total population in relation to the total amount of resources available (Urdal, 2005, p.418). In contrast to Malthus, political demography shifts perspective from total ratios to a disaggregated level. Goldstone (2012, p.11) argues that not only the overall population, but the size and resource endowment of any subgroup have the potential to change the dynamics of a defined society.

This highlights the topic’s relevance in the context of demography and political science. Demography acts as a first layer in determining size, distribution and shift of groups, while political demography represents an additional layer by analyzing the reaction of people and social institutions to changes in these variables (Goldstone, 2012, p.13). Therefore, Goldstone defines

this article’s topic as “[the] study of size, composition and distribution of population in relation to both government and politics” (2012, p.13). Figure 1 illustrates this concept by putting demographic variables at the centre. Disparities in these cause political dilemmas that affect various fields of political impact, which all come under the overarching concept of political demography, which in turn shapes national politics and international relations.

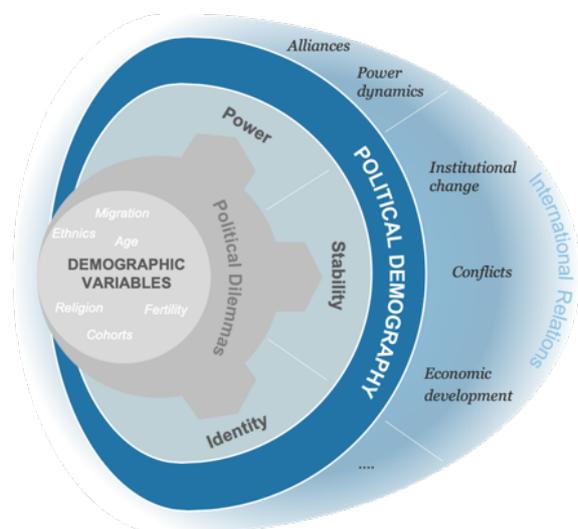


Figure 1: Visualization of Political Demography. Own Illustration

The paradigm of total population size and power remains prevalent up to the present day

The relationship between the size of a population and the power of a state is historically shaped by the perception that the bigger the population (and the economic development that comes with that), the more cultural and policy influence a country can exercise on a global scale (Howe & Jackson, 2012, p.37, p.44). This reasoning was as popular among ancient scholars (e.g. Polybius and Cicero, see Howe & Jackson, 2012, p.39), as it is today, seen in the fact that some political leaders explicitly place demographic issues at the top of their agenda to reinforce or justify their nationalist power position. Examples of these mediating policies include pronatalist tendencies through financial incentives in Russia (Rivkin-Fish, 2010) or the radical form of political engineering just recently observed among the Kurdish population in

Syria (Gardner, 2019). In addition, one can observe how social, cultural but also religious norms shape demographic characteristics, as seen in Sub-Saharan countries where these contextual factors impede the necessary decrease in fertility rates (Bakilana, 2016).

Policies serving the purpose of the mere exercise of power are highly controversial. However, the issue of the declining and aging populations of developed countries should be urgently considered by their strategic leaders. The European, East Asian and American workforce will undergo a tremendous diminishing transition in the long run, while Africa's working population is going to explode by 2100, as seen in Figure 2.

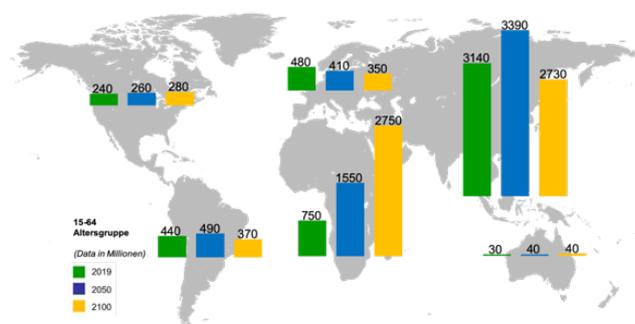


Figure 2: Population aged 15–64 years old, in millions. WDA Forum (2019, p.4).

The subsequent lack of innovation and struggling social welfare systems could result in economic decline in developed countries and it has the potential to irreversibly reshape the global value chain and power hierarchy (Dabbs Sciubba, 2012, p.65). Scholars state that by 2050 the combined GDP of Europe, the United States and Canada will double, while the world GDP will grow by a factor of five (Goldstone, 2010, p.33), mainly driven by the powerhouses of China and India, but also by emerging countries such as Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico (PWC, 2015, p.3).

Three points of leverage to remain influential in the shift towards multicentricity

The aforementioned development implies a shift towards a multicentric world, where the old and established nations' power is eroding, while new forces are emerging, therefore paving the way for new conflicts to arise (Kreft, 2013, p.14). This shift does not come overnight, but appears to be an unstoppable process (Kreft, 2013, p.14). Consequently, there should be a call for action for developed nations to implement policies in order to

preserve their capacity to act and remain influential on a global scale. With a view to taking appropriate countermeasures, the power transition theory proposes three dimensions that offer potential points of leverage, as presented in Figure 3 (Dabbs Sciubba, 2012, p.66). First, the absolute population size (i) can be leveraged by forming and fostering the integration of political units, i.e. alliances like the EU or NATO, that bundle resources and promote comparative strengths. Furthermore, increased immigration can act as an effective lever. Related to the absolute size of the labor force, productivity (ii) represents a vital variable of economic growth, notably by accumulating capital, efficiency and technological innovations. Third and finally, political capacity (iii), the state's ability to advance policy goals, needs to be strengthened in order to prevent age-based interests from undermining the overall aims (Dabbs Sciubba, 2012, pp.68–70, p.74).

Power Dimension	Points for Leverage
i. Population Size	Political Units
	Immigration
	Fertility Rates
ii. Productivity	Capital
	Efficiency
	Technology
iii. Political Capacity	Policy Implementation
	Prevent age-based Interest

Figure 3: Power transition theory. Dabbs Sciubba (2012, p.66).

The striking relationship between age structure and national stability

Demographic variables also play a crucial role on a national level, notably in the relationship between political conflict and a country's age structure. Nations can be divided into four age-structural clusters: young, youthful, transitional and mature states (Leahy Madsen, 2012, p.83). The first two clusters come with the propensity of a youth bulge, which in this paper, contrary to the common demographic definition, is defined as the disproportionate proportion of adults between 15 and 29 in the working-age population (ages 15–64) (Cincotta & Doces, 2012, p.100). Depending on the underlying social structures, a youth bulge can become a factor of instability, as there is statistical evidence of a relationship between age structure and conflict (Leahy Madsen, 2012, p.83). Research shows that younger age structures are prone to instability and conflict,

which can therefore affect the government type of a country (Leahy Madsen, 2012, p.84). In fact, the political volatility and uncertainty associated with the presence of a youth bulge is a major impediment to attaining the status of a liberal democracy (Cincotta & Doces, 2012, p.114). The propensity to become a free democracy¹ in relation to its age structure is presented in Figure 4.

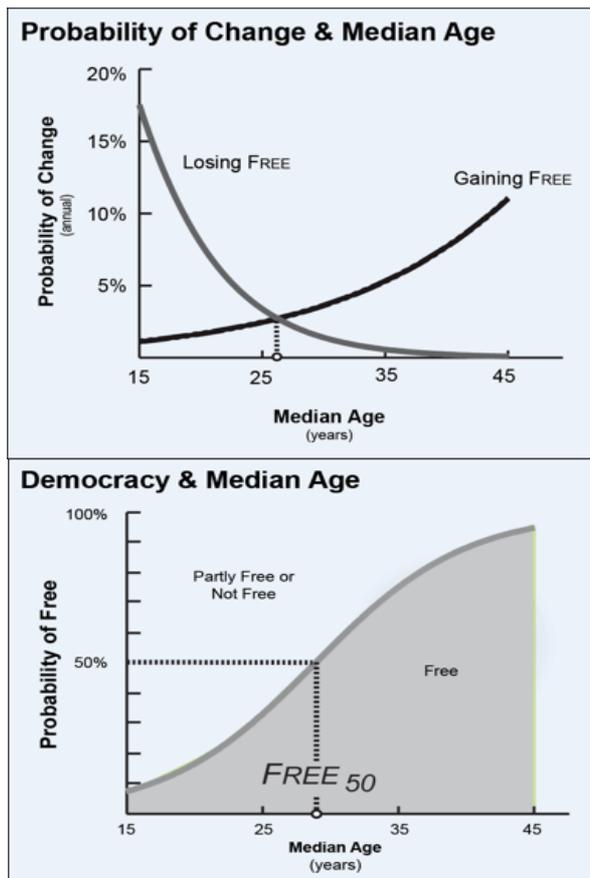


Figure 4: Age-structural maturity thesis. Cincotta (2015).

A mature age structure is not a completely necessary condition for achieving a free and liberal regime. However, Cincotta's model (2015) shows that the higher the median age, the easier it is to achieve and maintain a free democracy. In his later research, Cincotta (2017) defined a median age of 28.9 years as the "Free50", the 50% probability of attaining a liberal democracy. Applying Cincotta's model to the real world, Tunisia with its median age of 31.6 has a high probability of keeping the status as a free democracy that it achieved after the fall of Ben Ali's regime (Cincotta, 2015). However, one has to be careful how to use the model. It should not be used as a

blunt prediction tool and extended by a qualitative assessment, as like all models, it is based on past data and, therefore, cannot take into account things yet to come (Cincotta & Doces, 2012, p.115). Nonetheless, the model can help us better understand the historic and current global trends in political liberalization.

Measures to convert the demographic bomb into a global peace dividend

As discussed in the previous section, the relationship between violence and the youth bulge also depends on the underlying social structures. A pronounced youth bulge implies a large supply of individuals with low opportunity costs. Contextual factors influencing a youth bulge's course include economic development, education and the degree of urbanization. Countries with low development, a semi-democratic regime and a large absolute size of population are most prone to experiencing higher levels of conflict emerging from its youth bulge dynamics (Urdal, 2012, pp.120–123).

Nonetheless, youth bulges can also act as a driver of a country's development when that country can capture the demographic dividend. The demographic dividend is the economic development that occurs due to variations in the dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio of the non-working age population to the working population (Lin, 2012). Decreasing the dependency burden is positively associated with economic growth, which has been observed in the ascent of Asia's Tiger states (Urdal, 2012, p.121). A number of developing countries are within or on the verge of this demographic transition that may allow them to achieve the demographic dividend. Taking advantage of this dividend will lessen the effect of the youth bulge on political violence, ultimately transforming into a peace dividend (Urdal, 2012, p.128). In order to achieve this, policies that create opportunities for young people need to be implemented, notably by fostering high quality education, health, lower fertility rates and high employment (UNFPA, 2016).

The challenges mentioned above show how intertwined and ambiguous our global demographic issues are. On the one hand, there are overaged developed countries with a decreasing workforce, while on the other hand, there are developing countries that need to address their youth bulge as a central challenge. Therefore,

¹ As defined of Freedomhouse (2019).

the question arises as to how one can fix the dilemmas faced by both sides and thereby lead the world towards a more prosperous future.

Goldstone proposes to adapt our view of the world to a new three-world order based on the countries' demographic maturity, with the first world being aging and industrialized nations, the second world being states that are fast growing, economically dynamic and balanced in age, and a third world of fast growing and very young countries. The first and second worlds need to build efficient partnerships and actively engage with the third world by supporting and investing in better governance. He therefore sees the inevitable adaptation of institutions (e.g. NATO and the G7) by integrating the widely underrepresented second world, as their global role in the 21st century's economic and security questions becomes more and more crucial (Goldstone, 2010, pp.38–39).

Furthermore, effectively managed migration can act as a developmental vehicle for both developed and developing nations. Aging states can bring dynamism back into their workforce, which is tied to the power transition theory. For young and fragile states emigration can act as a safety valve to mitigate disproportionate youth bulges. Goldstone (2019) openly expresses that young labor, for example from Africa, should be recognized as a valuable and untapped resource by developed countries. With the relevant training, a corresponding return migration could create a positive cycle in the long run which could further improve the development prospects of African countries (Goldstone, 2019).

Strategic leaders need to take an integrated perspective on demography

The application of the concept of political demography is diverse and can be observed on an international, national or subnational level, as seen in the examples of geopolitics, aging and national security and the peace dividend.

The concept and examples presented show how important an integrative view on demography and political science has become. Today's demographic challenges are increasingly inter-linked and require goals that align with each other and that are achieved collectively (Dabbs Sciubba, 2012, p.77).

However, one can observe the opposite: "most countries are currently enacting policies that ignore or actually run counter to what they need in

terms of demographic trends" (Goldstone, Interview with the author of this paper, 29 October 2019). Strategic planners and policy makers should acknowledge that changes in demographic variables are powerful forces and political demographers are trying to decode and integrate them into the big picture – or in the words of Jack Goldstone: "We need to understand how these forces operate, if we are to take control of our destiny and shape it" (2012, p.276).

Key References

- Bakilana, A. (2016). 'Why Are Fertility Rates so High in Sub-Saharan Africa?' Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/why-are-fertility-rates-so-high-in-sub-saharan-africa>
- Cincotta, R. (2015). 'Will Tunisia's Democracy Survive? A View from Political Demography.' DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.4660.1127.
- Cincotta, R. (2017). '8 Rules of Political Demography That Help Forecast Tomorrow's World.' DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.22582.70721.
- Cincotta, R., & Doces, J. (2012). 'The Age-Structural Maturity Thesis.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Re-shaping International Security and national politics* (pp.98–116). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Dabbs Sciubba, J. (2012). 'A New Framework for Aging and Security.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Re-shaping International Security and National Politics* (pp.63–77). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, D. (2019, October 2). 'Syria Is Witnessing a Violent Demographic Re-engineering.' *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/e40cb754-e456-11e9-b112-9624ec9edc59>
- Goldstone, J. (2010). 'The New Population Bomb.' *Foreign Affairs*. 89(1), 31–43. DOI: 10.2307/20699781.
- Goldstone, J. (2012). 'A Theory of Political Demography.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (pp.11–28). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Goldstone, J. (2019). 'Africa 2050: Demographic Truth and Consequences.' Retrieved from <https://www.hoover.org/research/africa-2050-demographic-truth-and-consequences>
- Goldstone, J., Kaufmann, E., & Duffy Toft, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Howe, N., & Jackson, R. (2012). 'Demography and Geopolitics.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (pp.31–48). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kaufmann, E., & Duffy Toft, M. (2012). 'Introduction.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (pp.3–9). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kreft, H. (2013). 'Deutschland, Europa und der Aufstieg der neuen Gestaltungsmächte.' Retrieved from <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/173793/deutschland-europa-und-die-neuen-gestaltungsmaechte>
- Leahy Madsen, E. (2012). 'Age Structure and Development through a Policy Lens.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (pp.81–97). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lin, J. (2012). 'Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or a Bomb?' Retrieved from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/development/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries>

- PWC. (2015). 'The World in 2050.' Retrieved from:
<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/the-economy/assets/world-in-2050-february-2015.pdf>
- Rivkin-Fish, M. (2010). 'Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of "Maternity Capital".' *Slavic Review*, 69(3), 701–724. Retrieved from:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25746278>
- UNFPA. (2016). 'Demographic Dividend.' Retrieved from
<https://www.unfpa.org/demographic-dividend>
- Urdal, H. (2005). 'People vs. Malthus: Population Pressure, Environmental Degradation, and Armed Conflict Revisited.' *Journal of Peace Research*, 42(4), 417–434. Retrieved from
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30042334>
- Urdal, H. (2012). 'Youth Bulges and Violence.' In J. Goldstone, E. Kaufmann & M. Duffy Toft (Eds.), *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (pp.117–132). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- WDA Forum. (2019). Die Demographie des 21. Jahrhunderts [PowerPoint presentation].

About the author

Philippe Hachen is pursuing a master's degree in business management at the University of St. Gallen (HSG). In addition, he has completed his CEMS master's in international management at HSG and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Throughout his studies, Philippe gained international work experience in the consulting and luxury goods industry. The analyses and opinions presented in this article are his own, building on Jack A. Goldstone's publication *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics* (Goldstone et al., 2012).

Contact information:

philippe.hachen@student.unisg.ch