

The Politics of Demographic Change: Addressing the Youth Bulge in Ivory Coast**Farhan Hamdi Pratama**

Universitas Andalas

farhanhamdipratama@gmail.com**Abstract**

This research explores the relationship between youth bulge and political instability, using Ivory Coast as a case study. Despite being one of the world's poorest continents, Africa is experiencing a quick and considerable youth bulge, posing difficulties to political stability. The youth bulge phenomenon, which is defined by a disproportionate increase in the youthful population compared to other age groups, has historically been linked to political upheaval, as evidenced by events such as the Arab Spring. Lack of democracy, economic restrictions, and ethnic or religious discrimination are among the factors that contribute to political instability during a youth bulge. This study uses a qualitative research approach and secondary data analysis to investigate the impact of the youth bulge on the Ivory Coast political scene. The findings suggest a high youth unemployment rate of 35.7%, as well as considerable differences in educational access and political participation among young people. This lack of political engagement exacerbates the confusion, resulting in rebellion and instability. The study emphasizes the significance of tackling socioeconomic difficulties and increasing political inclusion to counteract the negative consequences of the youth bulge on political stability in Ivory Coast and other contexts.

Keywords; *Youth bulge, Ivory Coast, political instability, demographics, democracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite Africa being one of the most impoverished continents in the world, some of the poorest countries nonetheless have populations experiencing a quick and large youth bulge (Resnick & Thurlow, 2015). Urbanization has altered the way people live and interact across several continents, and it is expected to accelerate over time. Urbanization causes changes in a country's population, which can be defined as a shift in the relative age of a group of people caused primarily by changes in fertility, longevity (rejuvenation or aging of the population), international migration, and absolute population changes (Bollyky et al., 2022). Things like this can have an impact on political instability in a country since a shift in the global population affects a country's political stability. In global political demography, one tendency stands out: an increasing number of young people in a country, which is feared to have an impact on a country's political instability.

Historically, an increase in the number of young people, known as a youth bulge, has disrupted a country's political stability (Farzanegan & Witthuhn, 2017; Weber, 2019), most notably the Arab Spring phenomenon in 2011 (Tzannatos, 2021). The growing population of young people has three factors that contribute to political instability: a lack of democracy, a situation in which there is little or no government preparation in controlling young people, and the government's inability to accommodate and listen to the aspirations of young people in the

country. Furthermore, the second indicator is the economic aspect, which is a country's poor economy, which limits job options for young people, leaving them unable to compete and desperate. The final indicator is ethnic or religious discrimination; conflicts between ethnicities or religions undoubtedly jeopardize a country's security and peace; a situation in which young people are discriminated against based on ethnicity and religion renders young people in a country unable to express their opinions and politics calmly (Urdal, 2006).

The youth bulge is a phenomenon in which a country's productive population grows faster than its unproductive population (Assaad & Levison, 2013). The youth bulge is a regular occurrence in developing and underdeveloped countries alike. This is related to a period of development in which a country succeeds in reducing infant mortality but mothers continue to have high fertility rates, resulting in a substantial proportion of the population being children and young people.

The youth bulge is a double-edged sword that can be both a demographic advantage and a demographic disaster (Piselli et al., 2019). When a country has a youth bulge and more young people enter the workforce, the number of persons fully employed in productive activities rises, increasing by the country's average per capita. However, if the country's working-age youth are unable to find work and have no significant impact on the country's income, the demographic bomb will occur, potentially leading to political instability as young people are frustrated by their inability to find work due to limited job opportunities.

The youth bulge phenomenon poses both challenges and possibilities for countries, particularly in terms of maximizing the potential of their young populations (Apolte & Gerling, 2018). Countries that properly handle their youth's needs and aspirations might reap the benefits of a demographic dividend, which occurs when a big working-age population drives economic growth. Investments in education, skills training, and job creation tailored to the requirements of young people can help them reach their full potential as drivers of innovation and productivity. Furthermore, creating an inclusive political environment that allows adolescents to engage in decision-making processes can help to promote social cohesion and stability.

However, failing to address the difficulties linked with the youth bulge might intensify current problems and lead to sociopolitical upheaval. Inadequate employment prospects, combined with marginalization and discrimination, can lead to anger and disappointment among young people, rendering them open to radicalization and extremism. To encourage long-term development and reduce the danger of instability, policymakers must take comprehensive methods that address the diverse nature of the youth bulge, including economic, social, and political components.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research approach used in this study is qualitative, with secondary data being examined by the author. In this scenario, secondary data is the best option for the author because it uses data from around the internet that has been screened to remove erroneous information. The author also uses the descriptive qualitative method to analyze situations by explaining them using current theories.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main measure of a country's performance in dealing with the youth bulge phenomenon is its youth unemployment rate (Hartmann & Biira, 2021). The youth bulge can lead to political violence and rebellion as a result of socioeconomic conditions perceived by young people, such as a lack of democracy, the country's economy, and ethnic and religious discrimination, which can spark rebellion and revolution in a country. This is typically the situation in developing to underdeveloped countries with poor economic development rates. Ivory Coast is one of the countries experiencing a youth bulge; there is approximately 35.7% youth unemployment among those aged 15 to 29 (Hartmann & Biira, 2021). According to 2013 survey data, in rural Ivory Coast, less than 10% of all young people have stable employment in the official sector. Approximately 54% claimed never having attended school in their lives, with less than a third having completed primary schooling. This is attributable to a variety of causes, including a lack of political participation among young people aged 18 to 25 (Christiaensen & Premand, 2017). Only one in every four young people in Ivory Coast is interested in politics; further observations on voting during general elections show that young people participate less, resulting in political chaos in Ivory Coast, which has an impact on the de facto separation of Ivory Coast with rebellion and political mobility by one group, which spreads to various other aspects and causes political instabilities.

Lack of democracy in Ivory Coast

Power provides the owner with the ability to accomplish anything for honor, social status, money, and happiness in life. Ivory Coast demonstrates how power can destroy. Ivory Coast is split ethnically, religiously, and economically. The administration ruled in Abidjan, which had a Christian majority and served as the base of Laurent Gbagbo's followers from 2000 until April 2011 (Babo, 2022). Meanwhile, Allasane Dramane Ouattara arrived from the rebel-held north and was governed by Muslim immigrants who looked after businesspeople in Ivory Coast. Following the election results, Laurent Gbagbo, who lost to Allasane Dramane Ouattara, unexpectedly established himself as president; he and his followers insisted that Gbagbo had won (Babo, 2022).

Political engagement is a crucial feature of democracy. The political participation of a country's population indicates how well democracy is functioning. The 2010-2011 Ivory Coast presidential election is a real-life example of democracy. Ivory Coast attempted to establish traditional political participation but was unable to do so due to the adversary of democracy, racism. Chaos ensued, resulting in a civil war at the time.

A low level of democracy in a country with a large youth population suggests high political instability, as the absence of democracy inhibits young people from pursuing their interests. Ivory Coast's political landscape has been tarnished by a legacy of dictatorship and political instability, stifling democratic growth (Al-Jabri et al., 2022). Since winning independence from France in 1960, Ivory Coast has had periods of authoritarian governance, with power concentrated in the hands of a small group of political elites. The democratic

process has frequently been weakened by government repression, electoral fraud, and human rights violations, limiting the population's political involvement (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1994).

The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index routinely ranks Ivory Coast as low in terms of democracy and governance. In the most recent study, Ivory Coast was classified as a "hybrid regime," suggesting a flawed democracy with major weaknesses in electoral processes, civil freedoms, and political pluralism (Economist Intelligence Unit' (EIU), 2011). The lack of openness and accountability in governance has weakened public trust in institutions, contributing to social and political unrest. Furthermore, political leaders have used ethnic and religious differences to cement power and stifle opposition voices, weakening democratic norms. Discriminatory behaviors, especially against minorities, have hampered efforts to promote inclusive government and political engagement.

The combination of poor democratic institutions and ethnic-religious conflicts has exacerbated political instability and conflict, as evidenced by the 2010-2011 presidential election crisis. The failure to address these fundamental issues continues to impede the establishment of democracy and the promotion of peace and stability in the Ivory Coast.

Economic Factor of Ivory Coast

Aside from a lack of democracy, economic considerations might contribute to political instability in a country with a large youth population. By 2050, the African continent's population will have increased by 1.3 billion, accounting for 26% of the global population, with Ivory Coast accounting for 26.1 (Stanley, 2023). Ivory Coast has a large youth population aged 15 to 29, accounting for 28% of the overall population (Hartmann & Biira, 2021). This scenario is caused not just by population expansion, but also by migration from conflict-affected neighboring countries, like as Ivory Coast, which has absorbed over 2 million immigrants from Burkina Faso and Mali (Mitchell, 2011)

If it comes to economic factors, with a growing population and migration from neighboring countries, immigrants reduce job opportunities and lead to unemployment. A high unemployment rate leads to low living standards, causing a country's economy to deteriorate and affecting political stability. Young people who are unemployed due to heavy competition for jobs, insufficient jobs to accommodate more than half of the population, and arriving immigrants exacerbate the economic situation. The growing cost of fuel and food may lead to increased crime and political instability. Political instability caused by the youth bulge, which includes the economy, is also a contributing reason to the country's protests. The political crisis in the Ivory Coast in 2011 fueled political instability. Unemployment, immigrants, and a lack of job possibilities all point to political instability, albeit not on the scale of the Arab Spring.

Ethnic or Religious Discrimination

When looking at the conflict in Ivory Coast, it is possible to conclude that ethnic or religious prejudice became one of the causes of political instability when the youth bulge arose. In Ivory Coast, the conflict began with the 2010 National Elections, in which President Laurent Gbagbo opposed Alassane Ouattara, who won (Ogwang, 2011). Gbagbo rejected it and

declared himself the elected president, backed by the Constitutional Council, which contradicted Ouattara and accused him of fraud. From there, the violence escalated, with Gbagbo controlling the southern region, particularly around Abidjan, which had a large population of Gbagbo followers, the bulk of whom were Christians. Against Outarra, who arrived from the north, this region was ruled by rebels and dominated by Muslim immigrants who became successful businessmen and traders. The violence claimed thousands of lives and created political instability in Ivory Coast, jeopardizing the country's security and tranquility.

Ethnic and religious discrimination in Ivory Coast has deep historical roots, exacerbated by socio-political dynamics and economic disparities. The country's diverse population comprises over 60 ethnic groups, with the Baoulé, Bété, and Dioula being among the largest (Doumbia, 2021). Additionally, there is a significant divide between the predominantly Muslim North, which has historically been marginalized, and the predominantly Christian south, which has held more political and economic power. This regional and ethnic divide has fueled tensions, with politicians often exploiting ethnic identities for their gain, exacerbating divisions within society.

Furthermore, discrimination based on ethnicity and religion has been evident in various spheres of life, including access to education, employment opportunities, and political representation. Marginalized ethnic and religious groups have faced barriers in accessing basic services and participating fully in socio-economic and political life. This discrimination has deepened feelings of exclusion and resentment, contributing to social unrest and political instability. Moreover, the prevalence of discriminatory practices has hindered efforts towards reconciliation and nation-building, perpetuating cycles of violence and instability in Ivory Coast. Addressing these underlying issues of ethnic and religious discrimination is crucial for fostering inclusive governance and building a more peaceful and cohesive society in Ivory Coast.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an examination of Cote d'Ivoire's youth bulge and political instabilities demonstrates that ethnic and religious discrimination is a substantial contributor to political instability. While a lack of democracy and economic constraints are important factors, ethnic and religious prejudice emerge as the most relevant indicator in understanding the relationship between the youth bulge and political upheaval in Ivory Coast. Ethnic and religious tensions increase societal divisions, damage trust in institutions, and thwart efforts to promote peaceful coexistence and political stability. Furthermore, prejudice based on ethnicity and religion limits young people's ability to openly participate in political processes and express their frustrations, contributing to discontent and instability. As a result, resolving ethnic and religious prejudice is critical to addressing the root causes of political instability in Ivory Coast, which has been exacerbated by the youth bulge. Efforts to promote social cohesion, foster inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, and ensure equitable representation and inclusion of all segments of society are critical for establishing a more resilient and stable political environment in Ivory Coast and other contexts dealing with the challenges posed by the youth bulge.

5. REFERENCES

- Al-Jabri, N., Campbell, N., Saha, S., & Khan, S. (2022). The role of youth bulge on political instability: Cross-country evidence. *Economic Analysis and Policy*, 76, 1053–1074.
- Apolte, T., & Gerling, L. (2018). Youth bulges, insurrections and labor-market restrictions. *Public Choice*, 175(1), 63–93.
- Assaad, R., & Levison, D. (2013). Employment for youth: A growing challenge for the global community. *Background Research Paper for United Nations High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.
- Babo, A. (2022). Nationalism and Decolonization in the Ivory Coast. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*.
- Bollyky, T. J., Graetz, N., Dieleman, J., Miller-Petrie, M. K., Schoder, D., Joyce, S., Guillot, M., & Hay, S. I. (2022). Growing up and moving out: Migration and the demographic transition in low- and middle-income nations. *Population Studies*, 76(1), 63–80.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2022.2034919>
- Bratton, M., & Van de Walle, N. (1994). Neopatrimonial regimes and political transitions in Africa. *World Politics*, 46(4), 453–489.
- Christiaensen, L., & Premand, P. (2017). *Côte d'Ivoire Jobs Diagnostic: employment, productivity, and inclusion for poverty reduction*.
- Doumbia, A. (2021). *Ethnic Conflict in Côte d'Ivoire*.
- Economist Intelligence Unit' (EIU). (2011). *Democracy Index*. Economist Intelligence Unit' (EIU) .
- Farzanegan, M. R., & Witthuhn, S. (2017). Corruption and political stability: Does the youth bulge matter? *European Journal of Political Economy*, 49, 47–70.
- Hartmann, C., & Biira, C. P. (2021). Demographic change and political order in Sub-Saharan Africa: How Côte d'Ivoire and uganda deal with youth bulge and politicized migration. In *Global political demography: The politics of population change* (pp. 219–246). Springer International Publishing Cham.
- Mitchell, M. I. (2011). Insights from the cocoa regions in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana: Rethinking the migration–conflict nexus. *African Studies Review*, 54(2), 123–144.
- Ogwang, T. (2011). *The Root Causes of the Conflict in Ivory Coast*.
- Piselli, D., Loni, S. S., Colyard, K., & Nordquist, S. (2019). The Role of Youth in Achieving the SDGs: Supporting Youth-Led Solutions for Sustainable Food Systems. *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Through Sustainable Food Systems*, 229–245.
- Resnick, D., & Thurlow, J. (2015). *African youth and the persistence of marginalization*. Routledge London.
- Stanley, A. (2023, November). *AFRICAN CENTURY*. International Monetary Fund.

Tzannatos, Z. (2021). The youth bulge: The mismeasured, misunderstood, and mistreated Arab youth. In *The Routledge handbook on the Middle East economy* (pp. 302–318). Routledge.

Urdal, H. (2006). A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence. *International Studies Quarterly*, 50(3), 607–629.

Weber, H. (2019). Age structure and political violence: A re-assessment of the “youth bulge” hypothesis. *International Interactions*, 45(1), 80–112.