**Outline of Doctoral Dissertation**

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Dissertation topic: *The Influence of Demographic Change on Security: Urban Environments in Sub-Saharan Africa*

Suggested dissertation title: *The Influence of Demographic Change on Security: Sahel in the Spotlight*

**Introduction**

In my dissertation, I focus on the security implications of demographic change in Sub-Saharan Africa. As the two studied phenomena are extremely broad and the relationship between them very complex, I have initially planned to focus my attention on urban environments of Sub-Saharan Africa which are experiencing rapid population growth. During my first two years of doctoral study I have, however, realised that studying the population and security dynamics of urban centres is impossible without considering the broader national and regional context. Furthermore, as the large urban agglomerations of Sub-Saharan Africa are very divers, it would be necessary to analyse each of them in its own right in order to avoid generalisation. A large-N quantitative analysis could address some of these concerns, date accessibility and reliability, however, remain major issues when it comes to data on Sub-Saharan African cities. For the above outlined reasons, I have decided to shift the attention of my dissertation to a geographically defined area, which will also allow me to pay greater attention to regional specificities and dynamics, and to conduct a comparative analysis, which I will describe in more detail later on. Rapid urban population growth as a potential stress factor for the outbreak of violent conflict will be still considered within the geographic boundaries of the study.

Apart from analysing continent-wide demographic trends, and laying down basic assumptions on their relation to conflict, based on existing research in demographic security, my dissertation should focus specifically on four geographically proximate countries in the western Sahel region. The Sahel Countries are among those with the highest population growth rates on Earth and are also prone to experience violent conflict. They also show many similarities in terms of religion, culture, economy, or the availability of natural resources. Therefore, Sahel countries, and among them especially those with the highest fertility rates (Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria), may serve as an interesting case study and base for comparison with other Sub-Saharan African countries with different fertility profiles.

*Research questions*

Derived from these considerations, the core set of research questions, which I would like to answer in my dissertation, is as follows: What are the implications of demographic change (population growth rate, age structure change, urbanisation, migration etc.) for security? Are countries in the Sahel with continued high fertility more prone to the outbreak of violent conflict than countries with different fertility profiles in Sub-Saharan Africa? Is demographic change an opportunity or rather a threat? Under which conditions does it have a destabilising effect?

Apart from the above mentioned, the dissertation will raise a number of questions, which are thematically slightly distinct but closely related to the main subject matter. Firstly, as most of the existing literature focuses on population growth rate and age structure, I would like to pay some attention on the question how the rapid increase in Sub-Saharan Africa´s share of world population is influencing its global position in both geopolitical and socioeconomic terms.

Secondly, I would like to touch upon the decades-long debate concerning the interlinkages between (1) population growth, (2) resource scarcity and environmental degradation, and (3) increased risk of conflict. I will enquire how has this discourse developed over time and what light are recent developments shedding on it.

Finally, I will search for the answer to a number of Sahel-specific questions: Why are fertility rates decreasing more slowly in the four studied countries, than it was expected by demographers? What population policies do these countries have in place? What role are social and religious norms playing and is there a debate on population/family planning in the studied countries? With respect to this last set of questions I will try to utilise local sources and include perspectives from inside as much as possible.

*Theoretical and methodological framework*

To answer the outlined research questions, I will rely primarily on demographic security theory. The main objective of this rather recent field of study is to explore the security implications of demographic change. It needs to be clarified early on that demographic security theory does not presuppose any direct causal relationship between population growth and conflict. It has already moved far ahead of the simple Malthusian model of high population density and ensuing resource scarcity leading directly to violence. It acknowledges that high population growth can lead to violence only indirectly, and explores conditions under which certain causal relationship between the two is discernible. This indirect approach is already apparent in the moderate neo-Malthusian works of Thomas Homer-Dixon, who upheld that increased environmental scarcity is likely to have social ramification which in turn raise the risk of internal violent conflict.

As for the available literature on the topic, research focusing on the consequences of demographic change has until recently mostly dealt with environmental aspects or resource scarcity. However, with rising concerns over the security implications of unprecedented population growth, the consequences of demographic change have been subjected to deeper scrutiny in a number of pioneering studies in the field of demographic security. Jack A. Goldstone, who is considered to be the founding father of this field of study, has been one of the first to dispute the tenet that conflict caused by population growth is mainly due to shortages of resources.[[1]](#footnote-1) He contrastingly argues that environmental factors are much less important than population-growth-inflicted economic and political adversities in bringing about violent conflict.

This line of reasoning was further developed by Richard Cincotta,[[2]](#footnote-2) Elisabeth Leahy Madsen[[3]](#footnote-3) and Henrik Urdal,[[4]](#footnote-4) among the most important, who have looked at the adverse effect of various demographic stress factors and population distortions – such as populations growing too young, or too fast, or too urbanized – on the ability of prevailing economic and administrative institutions to maintain stable socialization and labour force absorption, a lack of which can lead to security problems.

In searching for the economic, political and social conditions under which populations distortions can lead to violent conflict, demographic security theory relies strongly on and incorporates the premises of both dominant theoretical traditions in the study of civil war – the “greed” perspective focusing on structural conditions providing opportunities to the eruption of violent action, and the “grievance” perspective which explains conflict through motivation and links it to the existence of economic or political grievances.

The opportunity literature is represented most prominently by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler.[[5]](#footnote-5) It stems from economic theory and emphasises the role of structural factors in providing opportunities (especially financial means) for an armed group to fight. With respect to the outlined demographic stress factors, the opportunity perspective provides some explanation on how the abundant supply of young men, who can actively participate in conflicts with a low opportunity cost, increases the risk of armed conflict. In other words, young rebel recruits see the potential gains from joining to be much higher than the possible costs, and thus they will prefer joining the conflict over alternative ways of earning a living.

One of the classic authors on the motive side is Ted Robert Gurr.[[6]](#footnote-6) This perspective has its roots in relative deprivation theory and sees the outbreak of violent conflict as motivated by two main types of grievances: economic, such as poverty, inequality, or economic decline; and political, for instance a lack of representation for various subgroups of the society, or the absence of a democratic system. Under conditions of severe population distortions, such as disproportionately large youth cohorts, the motive literature explains how frustration and despair stemming from economic and political realities (such as high unemployment, meagre income prospects, institutional obstacles, cronyism, or crowding in urban centres) boosts the chances of the eruption of violence. Demographic security theory operates with both these perspectives and upholds that the existence of serious grievances is no way sufficient for collective violent action to erupt – motive always needs to be supported by opportunity. It thus offers a synthesis between the “greed” and “grievance” traditions.

To explore the potential positive implications of the ongoing demographic changes in Sub-Saharan Africa, I will employ primarily demographic dividend theory.[[7]](#footnote-7) The demographic dividend is a phenomenon which occurs when declines in child mortality have been followed by declines in fertility, resulting in a low dependency ratio. It is a period of roughly a few decades, during which the working-age population needs to support relatively fewer dependents (children or elderly), potentially leading to economic growth.

The benefits of a demographic dividend, however, can only be reaped when a number of other conditions apply as well. Strong demand for labour is crucial, as large youth cohorts need to be able to find productive employment, rather than be unemployed or be forced into low-productivity work. Moreover, the economic environment needs to be conducive, and there need to be considerable investments into health and education, which increase productivity. Contrastingly, continued high fertility and high dependency rates, as well as unfavourable economic climate with high unemployment at the time when large youth cohorts enter into the labour market, increase the risk of conflict eruption significantly, instead of bringing economic benefits.

I will consider both the threats and opportunities provided by demographic change in the four studied Sahel countries. I will apply quantitative methods to compare the propensity of conflict in the selected four high-fertility Sahel countries with six groups of Sub-Saharan African countries with different fertility profiles:

* countries with fertility transition completed or close to completion (total fertility rate (TFR) estimated at less than three children per woman);
* countries with fertility transition underway (TFR between three and four children per woman);
* countries with fertility transition initiated (TFR between four and five children per woman);
* countries with slow and irregular transition (TFR between five and six children per woman);
* countries with very slow or incipient transition (TFR above six children per woman).

This comparative analysis should be one of the tools to answer the main research questions I will ask in my dissertation. It will also be complemented by analyses on the influence of different age structures or urbanisation rates, and it shall demonstrate some of the specificities of the Sahel area.

As for data sources, for data on conflict I will use mostly data assembled by the Conflict Data Project at the University of Uppsala. For demographic data I will rely mostly on the United Nations World Population Prospects and World Urbanisation Prospects.

**Outline of chapters**

1. Introduction
* brief introduction to the demographics of Sub-Saharan Africa and to the field of demographic security
* explanation why it is a relevant (unprecedented population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, abundance of demographic stress factors, such as large youth cohorts, or rapid urbanisation) but also sensitive issue to study (debates on population/family planning, which are implicitly related to demographic security, are still a taboo in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa)
* aim of the thesis, research questions
* birth of the debate concerning the security implications of demographic change – from Malthus to demographic security
	+ issue of demographic „determinism“ (is demography destiny?)
	+ linkage to the limits to growth debate (Club of Rome)
* justification of case selection
1. Demographic trends in Sub-Saharan Africa
* overview of the most important demographic trends in Sub-Saharan Africa
* sub-chapters:
	1. Populations growth rate
	+ introduction of different fertility transition profiles and the countries belonging to each category
	+ why was Sub-Saharan Africa the last to enter the demographic transition (process through which populations transition from a high fertility/high mortality demographic equilibrium to a low fertility/low mortality equilibrium through a high fertility/low mortality transition phase, which results in substantive population increase)
	+ why is this process so prolonged or even incipient in some Sub-Saharan African countries
	1. Age structure (youth bulges)
	2. Urbanisation (rural-urban migration)
	3. Migration (changing proportions of south-south and south-north migration)
	4. Share of world population (due to unprecedented demographic divergence between the global north and south, Sub-Saharan Africa constitutes an increasing proportion of the world population – what are the implications for its global position in both geopolitical and socioeconomic terms)
1. Security implications of demographic change
* overview of existing scientific knowledge on the demographic factors of insecurity (findings of mainly Goldstone, Cincotta, Leahy Madsen, Urdal, as well as other authors on the influence population growth rates, age structure, urbanisation rate, and migration for security, as well as on the interaction of these stress factors)
* analysis of the specific conditions under which demographic stress factors have a destabilising effect (opportunity and motive perspective to the outbreak of conflict; role of the economic (unemployment, informal employment, inequality), socio-political (cronyism, lack of representation of specific ethnic groups) and environmental (degradation, resource scarcity, climate change) context)
* analysis of the specific conditions under which countries can benefit from a demographic dividend
1. Case study: Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria
* context of the Sahel area (economy, resources, religion, culture, society)
	1. Population profiles of the selected countries
		1. Fertility and population policies
		+ description of the fertility profile of the selected countries
		+ why are fertility rates decreasing more slowly than it was expected by demographers (in subsequent editions of the UN World Population Prospects, estimates regarding future fertility rates are regularly corrected towards higher values)
		+ analysis of the role of social and religious norms, as well as regional specificities in maintaining continued high fertility
		+ outline of the selected countries´ population policies and the local discourse and perspectives on population/family planning
		1. Age structure and the demographic window of opportunity
		+ description of the age structure of the selected countries
		+ potential for a demographic dividend
	2. Demographic factors of insecurity in the selected countries
* comparative analysis of the influence of demographic change on security in the selected counties
* application of quantitative methods to compare the propensity of conflict in the selected countries with other Sub-Saharan African countries, according to their different:
	+ fertility profiles (analysing the relation between fertility level and insecurity)
	+ age structure (analysing the relation between median age and insecurity)
	+ urbanisation rate (analysing the relation between urbanisation rate and insecurity)
1. Conclusion
* summary of the outcomes of the case study
* topics for further scrutiny

**Summary**

My expectation with regard to the outcome of the dissertation is that it will present new evidence on the correlation between the occurrence of demographic stress factors and conflict. It should also demonstrate that this relation is not straightforward or automatic but depends strongly on specific contextual factors. Furthermore, the dissertation should provide an overview of the centuries-old debate on the socio-economic, environmental and security implications of rapid population growth. It should touch upon the issue of rapid shifts in various world regions´ share of the world population and the influence this shift is having on their respective global positions in both geopolitical and socioeconomic terms. I do not expect, however, to present a comprehensive account of this issue, as it is out of the scope of this dissertation, and while some early signals are already visible, more time is needed to have sufficient evidence for broader conclusions.

1. Goldstone, Jack A. (2002). “Population and security: How demographic change can lead to violent conflict.”

*Columbia Journal of International Affairs* *56*, 245-263. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cincotta, Richard, Robert Engelman, & Daniele Anastasion. (2003). *The security demographic.* Washington, DC: Population Action International. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Leahy, Elizabeth, with Robert Engelman, Carolyn Gibb Vogel, Sarah Haddock, & Tod Preston. (2007). *The shape of things to come.* Washington, DC: Population Action International. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Urdal, Henrik. (2006). “A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence.” *International Studies*

*Quarterly 50*, 607-629. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Collier, Paul, & Hoeffler, Anke. (2004). “Greed and Grievance in Civil War.” *Oxford Economic Papers 56*, 563–595. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gurr, Ted Robert. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. There is a vast literature available on the topic of demographic dividend. One of the most recent and comprehensive accounts focusing specifically on Sub-Saharan Africa is: Groth, Hans & May, John F., eds. (2017). *Africa’s Population: In Search of a Demographic Dividend*. Springer International Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)